Made with love by

Our goal is to preserve classic video game magazines so that they are not lost permanently.

People interested in helping out in any capacity, please visit us at retromags.com.

No profit is made from these scans, nor do we offer anything available from the publishers themselves.

If you come across anyone selling releases from this site, please do not support them and do let us know.

Thank you!

THE OFFICIAL GAMES MAGAZINE OF BEST BUY®

Gamer

ISSUE 016 | JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2012

HANDS-ON

MASS EFFECT 3

CAN COMMANDER SHEPARD SAVE THE WORLD...AGAIN? PG. 38

$120 WORTH OF COUPONS!
Including $10 off Assassin's Creed Revelations!
PG. 31

Max Payne 3 Previewed

Older, wiser, and more dangerous than ever. PG. 14

2012 Preview!

We run down the hottest games of 2012! PG. 44

Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim Rated

Could *Skyrim* be the game of the year? Read our review. PG. 62

$4.99US
Future
BEST BUY

Jagged Alliance Back in Action © 2012 published by bitComposer Games GmbH& Kalypso Media Group. Developed by COREPLAY. Jagged Alliance is a registered trademark of bitComposer Games GmbH. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners. All rights reserved. Windows, the Windows Start button, Xbox, Xbox 360, Xbox LIVE, and the Xbox logos are trademarks of the Microsoft group of companies, and "Games for Windows" and the Windows Start button logo are used under license from Microsoft.

Games for Windows

In this ISSUE 16

THE OFFICIAL GAMES MAGAZINE OF BEST BUY
Gamer
MASS EFFECT 3
$120 WORTH OF COUPONS!
CAN COMMANDER SHEPARD SAVE THE WORLD...AGAIN?
Max Payne 3 Previewed
2012 Preview!
Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim Rated

COVER STORY

36 MASS EFFECT 3
Following the events of *Mass Effect* and *Mass Effect 2*, can Commander Shepard save the world once and for all?

50 KINECT & MOVE ONE YEAR LATER
It's been a year since Microsoft and Sony jumped into the motion-control game. How has the last year gone, and what's in store?

GEAR
These Nvidia-powered tablets are all the rage. But don't miss out on Sony's PS3 3D bundle, Razer's MMO-gaming keyboard, and two sweet console headsets.

44 2012
WE KNOW WHERE ALL YOUR MONEY WILL GO
Sure, 2011 was a great year for gaming, but that's just so...last year. What do you have to look forward to in 2012? We got you!

Previews

14 Max Payne 3
Could this series get any darker? Read our preview and find out.

18 Final Fantasy XIII-2
Thirteen-two? Too...? We're not really sure, but whatever it is, it's working.

21 Combat Wings
Dogfighting is fun again at a mile high.

22 PlanetSide 2
Strap on some full-body armor. You'll need it for this MMOFPS.

24 NeverDead
Sir, you dropped your head!

26 Sniper Elite V2
Does this shooter need a scope to compete?

28 Game of Thrones
We know the HBO show is popular, but how will the game do?

33 PlayStation Vita
Take a peek into the portable system's tech specs and launch titles.

NEWS: FIRST TO KNOW

04 STAFF
Who runs this jungle, anyway?

06 BLIPS
Lizzie's got all the news that's fit to blip!

08 TABLET GAMES
You've got a tablet. We've got gaming expertise on tap.

10 BLIZZCON
Read up on Blizzard's hottest convention.

12 CALENDAR
Release dates? Why yes, we have them.

Top Picks

METAL GEAR SOLID: HD COLLECTION 58
Snake?! SNAAAAAAAAAAKE!

HALO: COMBAT EVOLVED ANNIVERSARY 60
Master Chief dusts off his decade-old armor.

THE ELDER SCROLLS V: SKYRIM 62
Long game is long.

JURASSIC PARK 65
Some things are better left extinct.

NEED FOR SPEED THE RUN 66
Stop shooting at me! I just want to race!

SUPER MARIO 3D LAND 68
This classic series jumps on the 3D bandwagon.

WWE '12 69
Another year of half-naked men in Spandex.

DRAGON BALL Z: ULTIMATE TENKAICHI 70
Just not dragon ballsy enough.

KIRBY'S RETURN TO DREAM LAND 71
How much does Kirby suck?

SERIOUS SAM 3: BFE 72
Sam packs serious amounts of fun.

GOLDENEYE RELOADED 73
Does this reimagined N64 shooter age well?

LEGO HARRY POTTER 74
Have you ever seen a more adorable wizard?

TEKKEN HYBRID 75
Two *Tekkens* isn't always better than one.

ULTIMATE MARVEL VS. CAPCOM 76
Does the Ultimate game deserve an Ultimate score?

KINECT DISNEY ADVENTURE 77
Cheaper than a trip to Disneyland.

12 MINI REVIEWS! 78
Mario Kart 7, Karaoke Revolution: Glee, Your Shape, and more!

MEET THE STAFF

Andy Eddy Executive Editor
Andy and Wil are always complaining about how behind they are on finishing games. After finishing *Assassin's Creed Revelations* for last month's review, Andy decided to play it again! Where are his priorities?

Lizzie "Sizzle" Cuevas Associate Editor
Lizzie just can't resist the temptation to review games when they show up. This month's mistake? *Skyrim*. Considering the game has about 1000 hours of playtime, can she finish it in time to write her review? Time will tell.

Jenny "Nag Vader" Esdaile Art Director
When she's not putting together the world's most-super-awesome(st) gaming magazine, Jenny likes to...come to think of it, none of us have any idea what she does when she leaves this place. Hmm...very suspicious.

Jillian Lungaro Designer
While everyone else is out buying this new thing and that new thing, Jillian scours the underbelly of consumer society for that special rare item. Her latest find? *Phantasm III* on Laserdisc. We're being totally serious.

Letter from the EDITOR

WELCOME TO @GAMER

Several months ago, my son was lamenting that all of his friends thought he was nuts for not liking the original *Mass Effect*. While he enjoyed *Mass Effect 2*, he said that he just couldn't get into the first game. I declared that he was dead to me and to leave his keys on the dining room table before he left.

Needless to say, in the face of impending homelessness, he went back and gave it another try. Maybe it's these harsh San Francisco winters or his desire for food, but he came around and is now fully on the bandwagon—so much so that when I told him about this month's cover story, he started pumping me for info.

"Relax, kid," I told him. "You'll have to wait until the magazine comes out like everyone else." Well, here we are. We sent Group Editor-in-Chief Chuck Osborn all the way to beautiful Edmonton to dig up all he could about the last in this awesome trilogy.

I won't spoil anything in this column. Just know that, like my son, any gamer worth their salt will love *Mass Effect 3*. Even when the threat of homelessness isn't on the table.

William O'Neal
Editor-in-Chief

QR CODES AND HOW THEY WORK

Throughout the magazine you'll notice QR codes for some of the games. Simply install a QR reader for your smartphone (or install the Best Buy app for iPhone or Android), aim it at the QR code, and you'll be taken to a trailer for the game you just scanned.

Staff_

@GAMER

EDITORIAL
GROUP EDITOR-IN-CHIEF Chuck Osborn
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF William O'Neal
EXECUTIVE EDITOR Andy Eddy
ASSOCIATE EDITOR Lizzie Cuevas
CONTRIBUTORS Jordan Baughman, Jason Buhrmester, Matt Cabral, David Chapman, Taylor Cocke, Hollander Cooper, Mitch Dyer, Russ Frushtick, Gord Goble, Andrew Hayward, Neilie Johnson, George Jones, Heidi Kemps, Evan Narcisse, Kyle Orland, Dennis Scimeca, Ryan Scott, Timothy J. Seppala, Evan Shamoon
COPY EDITOR Alexandra Hall
GROUP PRODUCTION MANAGER Debra Guilfoyle

ART
ART DIRECTOR Jenny Esdaile
DESIGNERS Jillian Lungaro, Rosemary Pinkham
PHOTOGRAPHER Samantha Berg

BUSINESS
VP, FUTURE PLUS Ursula Morgan
GROUP ACCOUNT DIRECTOR David Barrow
VP, GAMES GROUP Kelly Corten

ADVERTISING SALES
ADVERTISING DIRECTOR
Brandie Rushing: brushing@futureus.com
T: 336 492 2265
DIRECTOR OF INTEGRATED SALES
Nathan Hunt: nhunt@futureus.com
C: 415 269 5402
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR OF SALES
Isaac Ugay: iugay@futureus.com
C: 714 381 3419

PRODUCTION
PRODUCTION DIRECTOR Michael Hollister
PRODUCTION MANAGER Larry Briseno
PRINT ORDER COORDINATOR Jennifer Lim

CONSUMER MARKETING
CIRCULATION DIRECTOR Stephanie Blake
NEWSSTAND DIRECTOR Bill Shewey
NEWSTAND BUSINESS ANALYST Cheryl Stephenson
DIRECTOR OF eCOMMERCE AND FULFULLMENT Lisa Radler
RETENTION MARKETING MANAGER Mike Hill

FUTURE US, INC.
4000 Shoreline Court, Suite 400,
South San Francisco, CA 94080
www.futureus.com
CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER Rachelle Considine
VP/CFO John Sutton

BEST BUY CO., INC.
7601 Penn Avenue South
Richfield, Minnesota 55423
www.bestbuy.com

SUBSCRIBER CUSTOMER SERVICE:
@GAMER Customer Care, P.O. Box 5851, Harlan, IA 51593-1351. Online: www.atgamermagazine.com/customerservice. Phone: 800-678-3643. Email GMRcustserv@cdsfulfillment.com.

REPRINTS: Future US, Inc., 4000 Shoreline Court, Suite 400, South San Francisco, CA 94080. Phone: (650) 872-1642. Fax (650) 872-2207. Online: www.futureus.com.

LEGAL STUFF
@GAMER (ISSN 2160-469X) is published monthly, except bi-monthly in January/February and July/August, by Future US, Inc., 4000 Shoreline Court, Suite 400, South San Francisco, CA 94080, USA. Application to mail at Periodicals Postage Rates is pending at San Bruno, CA and additional mailing offices. Basic subscription rates: one year (10 issues) US $14.99. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *@GAMER*, P.O. Box 5851, Harlan, IA 51593-1351. Ride-Along Enclosure in the following editions: None. Standard Mail Enclosure in the following editions: None. Future US, Inc. also publishes *Crochet Today!, Guitar Aficionado, Guitar World, Knitting Today!, MacLife, Maximum PC, Nintendo Power, The Official Xbox Magazine, PlayStation: The Official Magazine, PC Gamer, Revolver, and Windows: The Official Magazine*. Entire contents copyright 2011, Future US, Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduction on the Internet of the articles and pictures in this magazine is illegal without the prior written consent of *@GAMER*. Products named in the pages of *@GAMER* are trademarks of their respective companies. PRODUCED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

@GAMER is published in association with Best Buy.

FUTURE plc
30 Monmouth St., Bath, Avon, BA1 2BW, England
www.thefuturenetwork.plc.uk / Tel +44 1225 442244
NON-EXECUTIVE CHAIRMAN Peter Allen
GROUP CHIEF EXECUTIVE Mark Wood
GROUP FINANCE DIRECTOR Graham Harding

EMAIL letters@atgamermagazine.com
TWITTER @GAMER GOOGLE+ Search "@GAMER Magazine"
FACEBOOK facebook.com/ATGAMER

Does *Halo: Combat Evolved Anniversary* run on the *Halo: Reach* engine?

–Tyler A. via email

ED: Halo: Combat Evolved Anniversary's campaign mode actually runs on the original game's engine! Well, at least when you've switched to Classic Mode (where you can go back to the original 2001 game's graphics with the press of the back button on the Xbox 360). Otherwise, the HD campaign runs on Saber's proprietary graphics engine.

However, the multiplayer mode in Anniversary is what runs on the Reach engine. For more on this, check out our review of Halo: Combat Evolved Anniversary on page 60 of this issue!

I just beat *Assassin's Creed Revelations* and loved it! I feel that Mr. Eddy's review on it was spot on and it did pick up nicely from *Brotherhood*. But since this concludes the story of Ezio, does that mean it's the last *Assassin's Creed* game?

–Carlo P. via email

ED: Ezio's story may be over, but the Assassin's Creed franchise definitely is not.

In fact, last month Ubisoft already confirmed plans to launch a new Assassin's Creed title in 2012. Of course, no further details were given about that, but bits and hints have been leaking out on the Internet, including an online survey asking folks which cities and time periods they'd like to see in future Assassin's Creed games. Some of the places mentioned were China, England, America, and Japan during various historical eras.

All I care about is the PS Vita. When is it coming out, what are the launch titles, and how much will it be?

–Joey G. via email

ED: Whoa there, cowboy. Yes, the PS Vita is definitely something to get excited about, especially with its 3G capability, OLED multitouch screen technology, and front- and rear-facing cameras. But at least in North America, you'll have to wait until February 22, 2012 to get your hands on one of these beauties at $249 for the Wi-Fi model and $299 for the 3G/Wi-Fi model.

Don't put your wallet away just yet. If you want to get additional storage (with the various media capabilities on the PS Vita, you'll need it), prepare to spend anywhere from $30–$120 on Sony's proprietary PS Vita memory cards, depending on size.

We're hoping that the titles coming out for the Vita make up for the hole it'll burn in our pockets, and the launch lineup looks promising already, including Uncharted: Golden Abyss, ModNation Racers: Road Trip, Gravity Rush, WipEout 2048, Reality Fighters, Little Deviants, Everybody's Golf, Escape Plan, Hustle Kings, MotorStorm RC, Top Darts, and Super Stardust Delta. The games announced that are still in development don't sound too shabby either. A little Call of Duty, anyone?

GAMING TRENDS, 140 CHARACTERS AT A TIME

Follow us!

Get more at @GAMER

TWEETER: WIL O'NEAL TWITTER: @GAMER_WONEAL
Is it lame that I'm sore from using *Your Shape Fitness Evolved 2012* for Kinect?

TWEETER: ANDY EDDY TWITTER: @VIDGAMES
Looking back on the Thanksgiving weekend, plans to dip into a lot of games turned into four days of *Saints Row The Third*. Fine with me.

TWEETER: LIZZIE CUEVAS TWITTER: @GAMER_LIZZIE
Caught up with @phoebesmalls tonight. Then she asked me who *Skyrim* was and if he was my new boyfriend since I kept tweeting about him.

TWEETER: CHUCK OSBORN TWITTER: @CHUCKONGAMES
Spent the long Thanksgiving weekend playing *Jurassic Park*, *Batman: Arkham City*, and *Super Mario 3D Land*. Oops, forgot to eat turkey! (Kidding!)

PODCAST atgamerpodcast.com
[Tune in for the latest information about the games industry from the front lines.]

BEST BUY CUSTOMER REVIEWS & RATINGS

WANT TO HAVE YOUR SAY?

What are you playing now? Do you like it? Do you hate it? Let the other @GAMER readers know what you think—send in a short 50- to 100-word review to reviews@atgamermagazine.com, and we'll post some of them here each issue.

Submit your review to:
reviews@atgamermagazine.com

UNCHARTED 3

Drake is back again, and he knows the exact formula for a cinematic gaming adventure. Perhaps that's why Uncharted 3 is disappointingly predictable. It's not a boring experience, but thanks to outdated shooting mechanics and a feeling of restriction as the overly suggestive camera points you in one direction, you won't be glued to your sofa in suspense like you may have been for the prequels.

Score: 4/5

–Matt H.

BEST BUY rewardzone
GAMERS CLUB
[UNLOCKED]

We know you can't live without your monthly dose of @GAMER. Go to your local Best Buy and join the all-new Reward Zone Gamers Club Unlocked program for $14.99 to get a full year's subscription and other exclusive benefits. Trust us, it's that easy.

[Note: Letters may be edited for size and clarity.]

Blips...

News, rumors, and game culture deconstructed

NEWS BITES

MICROSOFT sold over 960,000 Xbox 360 consoles in the U.S. over Thanksgiving weekend, making it "the biggest sales week in the history of Xbox" according to Major Nelson.

THE ESRB and CTIA plan to impose a voluntary rating system for mobile apps to generate an age-appropriateness rating from 6+ to 18+ and regulate content such as sex and violence.

BATTLEFIELD 3 has sold over 8 million copies since its launch on October 25, 2011.

PATRIOTS IS A COOL STORY, BRO

UBI'S NEWEST TOM CLANCY GAME

These outfits are also great for skiing.

Indeed it is, but is that all it is? Ubisoft's "target gameplay" trailer for the upcoming *Tom Clancy's Rainbow 6 Patriots* showcases a lot of interesting concepts for the shooter, but seems to lean more on the side of *Heavy Rain*-style button-pressing challenges and dramatic cut-scenes rather than the skillful headshots series fans would expect.

The game takes place in New York City and this time the Rainbow squad is up against domestic terrorists who are lashing out against corporate and political greed. The trailer shows the terrorists taking a man hostage in his own home, and then strapping explosives onto him.

According to Ubisoft, improvements from previous *Rainbow 6* games include redesigns of the cover and weapons systems. Multiplayer is also being improved, at least in the pre-game lobby, allowing you to plan strategies before matches.

Ubi's still holding out on all the major details, but we have plenty of time to see more before the game's 2013 launch.

THE RAPTR REPORT

What are the hottest games being played by Xbox 360 and PC gamers? Raptr.com has the answer.

LEAGUE OF LEGENDS

1	Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3
2	The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim
3	Saints Row: The Third
4	Assassin's Creed Revelations
5	Halo: Combat Evolved Anniversary
6	Star Wars: The Old Republic (beta)
7	DOTA 2 (beta)
8	World of Warcraft
9	Final Fantasy XI: Online
10	League of Legends
11	Football Manager 12
12	CastleVille
13	WWE '12
14	FIFA Soccer 12
15	Mine Craft

FIFA SOCCER 12

BEST BUY BONUS

FINAL FANTASY XIII-2

Get a free hardcover book when you pre-order *Final Fantasy XIII-2* for Xbox 360 or PlayStation 3 on BestBuy.com. With this book, you'll find out what happened between *XIII* and *XIII-2*.

INSIDE GOSSIP

SUPER SMASH SONY

SuperBot Entertainment is rumored to be developing a *Super Smash Bros.*-esque brawler called *Title Fight* that will star a cast of Sony-specific gaming luminaries. Names flying around the rumor mill include Nathan Drake, Sly Cooper, and Sweet Tooth, who was shown in a leaked image from a deleted tweet by senior level designer Chris Molina. Oops!

IN THE WORKS

EAST MEETS WEST, MAKES AN RPG \\

Square Enix is working on an Unreal-powered action-RPG under the direction of *Dragon Quest IX*'s Ryutaro Ichimura.

WHERE IN THE WORLD?

SCEA - FOSTER CITY, CA, USA

ON THE MOVE

Sony Computer Entertainment America is based in Foster City, CA, which has served as headquarters for all North American operations since 1994. Since the launch of the first PlayStation, SCEA's made revolutionary changes to the world of videogames.

Nerd Words...

BOOK OF CAIN

If you can't wait till the release of *Diablo III*, perhaps you can pass the time by checking out *Diablo III: Book of Cain*. This hardcover tome serves as Deckard Cain's (the recurring character from the first and second *Diablo* games) record of *Diablo* universe lore, chronicling the eternal conflict between the High Heavens and the Burning Hells. Its ominous cover is just part of the book's design as an "in-world artifact," in which you'll find illustrations by Blizzard artists Brom, Alan Lee, and Adrian Smith. *Diablo III: Book of Cain* released in North America on December 13, 2011.

DON'T FORGET THE POPCORN!

AT THE MOVIES

Some great fan-made videos have been surfacing on YouTube, making us more excited for the possibilty of epic videogame movies!

HALF-LIFE: ORIGINS

We were almost fooled into thinking that this thrilling, live-action independent short film by Infectious Designer was the next Source engine game. The film opens up much like the game does, with Gordon Freeman stepping onto the Black Mesa Transit System. Brace yourself for the awesome HEV Mark IV Protective Suit.

BIOSHOCK MOVIE (2013)

This fan-made teaser trailer for a fake BioShock movie said to come out in 2013 really got our hopes up. Though it barely goes longer than 30 seconds, the warm vinyl music reminiscent of the 1920s and the cool shots of the man washed up on the shore leave you wanting more.

Five Questions with...

CLAIM TO FAME...
Runs the official PlayStation blog.

JEFF RUBENSTEIN

SCEA's Senior Social Media Manager

1 What's a typical day like for you at SCEA?

Mostly killing dragons and sliding across the hoods of expensive Italian sports cars—in slow motion. Actually, it's lots and lots of meetings and email. Our goal is to connect the people making PS3 and PS Vita games directly to gamers, and those developers live all over the world, so it takes a lot of coordination. We end up speaking to millions of people every day via Twitter, Facebook, and the PlayStation blog, and there's just three of us. It's kind of crazy, really, but I think it's one of the best jobs in the industry.

2 What's one of the biggest challenges you've encountered in your career?

For my first GDC, we decided to set up a "bloggers lounge" so people that don't have access to the event could try out our upcoming games and meet with our devs. I had never thrown an event bigger than a surprise birthday party, so I was in way over my head arranging an event that drew hundreds of people. And then I got the flu. Now I know why brides are so stressed out at weddings.

3 What's your favorite hobby outside games?

We've got an "official" PlayStation soccer team here at the office that I play in weekly. Not a FIFA PS3 league, but actual futbol. We even had Adidas kits made up with the PS logo on them. I'm terrible, but we at least look cool.

4 Which character would win in an epic SCEA brawl?

Never count out the small but relentless Patapons! If a handful of those little guys can take down an endless string of towering monsters, I don't see anyone stopping them. They've got great rhythm, too. I'd like to see them lay down beats for *Parappa the Rapper*.

5 How many Move injuries have you witnessed?

I've whacked a couple of family members while competing in the Gladiator Duel event of *Sports Champions*.

Featured Game:

MILITARY MADNESS

Blast bad dudes on the go in this intense iPad shooter.

MODERN COMBAT 3: FALLEN NATION

Platforms:
$6.99, Gameloft, gameloft.com

Modern Combat 3: Fallen Nation may not boast the scale or production values of big-budget console shooters, but if the iPad is your platform of choice, it's easily the best substitute around. In the single-player campaign, you'll down terrorists left and right in a quest to "take back America," with explosive setpieces and vehicle-based missions to shake up the typical on-foot action. But it's the online multiplayer action that really makes *Fallen Nation* a must-have, as up to 12 players can duke it out in numerous solo and team-based play modes, which satisfy in a very real way. It's the best online shooter experience on a handheld platform to date—for just $7.

Online action supports up to 12 players.

Arson or just terrible fire codes?

SPRINKLE

Platforms:
$1.99, Mediocre AB, sprinklegame.com

Tiny blazes shouldn't be a match for your bulging fire hose, but what if you can't reach them? That's the premise guiding *Sprinkle*, an iPad and Android puzzler in which you'll use water to not only douse the flames, but also move platforms and solve light conundrums to get the liquid where it needs to go before the villages burn down. It's a clever, accessible option for the whole family, plus the water effects are often dazzling.

Unleash dictionaries of mass destruction.

QUARREL DELUXE

Platforms:
$2.99, Indiagames, quarrelgame.com

Word games are quite plentiful on the App Store, but *Quarrel Deluxe* does much more with its familiar letter tiles. Instead of just spelling out words for points, you'll construct terms in a *Risk*-like battle for map supremacy against up to three skilled AI players. In a strategic twist, the number of soldiers you have planted on any given spot determines how many letters are used in each skirmish, putting smaller brigades at a serious disadvantage.

At this rate your loot'll be spent on repairs.

RECKLESS GETAWAY

Platforms:
$2.99, Polarbit, polarbit.com

Despite its overhead perspective, *Reckless Getaway* serves up the same kind of four-wheeled thrills found in *Burnout* and *Need for Speed*, tasking you with blazing through tense missions by dodging traffic hazards and knocking aggressive police cruisers to the curb. Available on both iPad and Android tablets, this action-oriented driving game rewards you for wicked stunts, bumps, and traffic mishaps, giving you extra incentive to drive like crazy in each fevered chase.

Just try to find a cheerier app.

WHALE TRAIL

Platforms:
$0.99, ustwo, ustwo.co.uk

Ready for a downright surreal iPad game? Don't miss *Whale Trail*, a bite-sized wonder that lets you guide a cartoon whale around angry-looking clouds by tapping and holding the screen. It's charmingly designed and backed by an irresistibly catchy theme song, and while easy enough to pick up and play, *Whale Trail* also serves as a sharp obsession for leaderboard chasers. Good luck getting through this one without cracking a smile.

For an eldritch horror that is one fabulous feather boa.

DARK MEADOW

Platforms:

$5.99, Phosphor Games, phosphorgames.com

Handheld games often struggle to deliver haunting, atmospheric aesthetics, but *Dark Meadow* nails it by tossing you into an abandoned hospital occupied by one other crackpot patient and a whole host of freaky monsters. It plays a fair bit like iOS hit *Infinity Blade*, as you'll dispatch foes in static fight sequences using sword swipes and parry maneuvers, but *Dark Meadow* stands apart by mixing horror and humor to create an alluring iPad adventure worth exploring.

▼ "Flamethrower" is such a helpful word.

SCRIBBLENAUTS REMIX

Platforms:

$4.99, Warner Bros., warnerbros.com

The beloved Nintendo DS series is finally available on iPad, and it's as charming and effective as it ever was. *Scribblenauts* lets you type in thousands of words to create items for solving simple puzzles, and *Remix* collects dozens of past missions plus new ones that'll test both your logic and vocabulary. With a sleek visual upgrade and a much cheaper price point, *Scribblenauts Remix* may be the best version released to date, especially for newcomers.

Fresh experiences with retro looks

Pixel Perfect!

NEW GAMES, OLD GRAPHICS

While the iPad and Android tablets are capable of pushing out elaborate 3D visuals, many likes instead choose to pay homage to classic games with blissful pixel-centric aesthetics. Here are 10 newer releases that look like old favorites.

01 **THE LAST ROCKET** ($2.99, shaunirman.com)
It's a dead ringer for an 8-bit Nintendo-era game, but this recent favorite is seriously cerebral, tasking you with guiding a cute rocket through hazard-filled rooms.

02 **PAC'N-JUMP** ($1.99, namcogames.com)
Sure, *Pac-Man* is best known as a retro gaming icon, but this fresh spin-off takes after *Doodle Jump*'s platform-hopping approach, albeit with slick pixel graphics.

03 **SAD ROBOT** (Free, colorbox.com.vn)
Don't worry, be happy: This vibrant action game sees a high-flying robot nabbing coins and dodging hazards while a pulsing background track recounts his emotional past.

04 **CANABALT** ($2.99, canabalt.com)
Singlehandedly responsible for the myriad running games on the App Store, *Canabalt*'s gray-and-white look recalls simpler times—but it's an absolute blast.

05 **BIT PILOT** ($0.99, bitpilotgame.com)
Most games about spaceships find you blasting everything in sight, but in *Bit Pilot* all you'll do is avoid fast-moving asteroids. Amazingly, it's just as hectic.

06 **GOATUP** ($1.99, llamasoft.co.uk)
GoatUp may be the only game to star goats that have to constantly jump to stay alive, while also kissing companions to spawn kids. It's weird, but entertaining.

07 **BREAKEROIDS** ($1.99, coolpowers.com)
With a neon look that spotlights dead-simple geometry, this blend of classic arcade hits *Breakout* and *Asteroids* feels surprisingly fresh—and hugely addictive.

08 **PIX'N LOVE RUSH DX** ($0.99, bulkypix.com)
How much does this simple platform-jumping game revere the past? So much so that most of the iPad screen is plastered with fake handheld system overlays.

09 **HYPERSHIP OUT OF CONTROL** ($0.99, funinfused.com)
This speedy game lets you guide a ship that's hurtling towards doom in asteroid fields and other tricky scenarios. Watch out for motion sickness! (Seriously.)

10 **FORGET-ME-NOT** ($1.99, nyaru.net)
If Pac-Man featured a random assortment of mazes, plus the ability to shoot enemies, it'd be like *Forget-Me-Not*. Wait, that's nothing like *Pac-Man*. Still, it's fun.

BLIZZCON

Quite possibly the best BlizzCon to date

If there's one game developer that can get away with throwing massive annual conventions celebrating its own awesomeness, it's Blizzard Entertainment. Rocking a 20-year track record that's spawned series such as *Warcraft*, *Diablo*, and *StarCraft*, it's become pretty clear that these people know what they're doing. This year's BlizzCon, in particular, was absolutely incredible, because Blizzard had a new announcement for each of its major franchises.

Michael Morhaime, Blizzard's president and cofounder, kicked off the festivities by thanking the 26,000 attending and announcing that, starting on October 21, 2011, anyone who commits to 12 months of *World of Warcraft* will get a digital copy of *Diablo III* absolutely free. In addition, subscribers will also get guaranteed access to the next WoW expansion beta and an exclusive in-game mount, Tyrael's Charger.

After some thunderous rounds of applause, the stage was passed on to Chris Metzen, Blizzard's vice president of creative development. Brandishing a Horde Doomhammer, Metzen briefly touched on *Diablo III*, saying it was in the homestretch for an early 2012 release. He then unveiled WoW's latest expansion, *Mists of Pandaria*. This latest iteration will feature an entirely new continent to explore, the new Pandaren race (playable by both Horde and Alliance), the new Monk class, and an increased level cap to 90. Looks like MMORPG and Blizzard fanatics have quite a bit to look forward to in the coming year.

A CAVALCADE OF COSPLAYERS

[illegible]

MOHR COSTUME CONTESTS, PLEASE!

While BlizzCon is typically home to dozens of talented cosplayers showing their love for all of Blizzard's major franchises, this year's competition featured some ridiculously epic costumes. While there seemed to be an overabundance of female contestants sporting Sylvanas Windrunner getups, the competition's top three were truly a sight to behold. Anaheim local Chris White (right) took home $2,000 for second place and received a standing ovation more than once for his meticulously crafted Judgment Armor set and Ashbringer sword.

Actor/funnyman Jay Mohr (left) returned to host the cosplay and dance competitions. Fortunately, the comedian didn't have to contend with any overzealous contestants breaking their own limbs on-stage this time around.

▼ BlizzCon 2011 marks the first time the GSL tournament has taken place outside of Korea.

▼ *Warcraft*, *Diablo*, and *StarCraft*-inspired art filled the show floor. Take this painstakingly detailed model, for example.

▲ Michael Morhaime isn't just an incredibly accomplished supergeek, he's also a sick bassist.

▲ There's no better way to end a giant gaming convention than with a Foo Fighters concert.

DIABLO III CAN'T COME FAST ENOUGH

Lines began to reach the point of absurdity as Blizzard fans waited patiently for their turns at the *Diablo III* kiosks. From the moment the show floor opened to day's end, every computer sat occupied as gamers squared off in the new PvP beta. My limited time with the game left some very good impressions. It looks as though Blizzard is well on its way to releasing another critically acclaimed hit.

CALENDAR

JANUARY 2012

■ Game Release Date ■ The @GAMER Podcast ■ This day in videogame history... ■ Hardware

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
01 @GAMER ISSUE 16 ON SALE NEW YEAR'S DAY	02 SEE PAGE 18	03	04	05	06 THE @GAMER PODCAST, EPISODE 32	07
08	09	10 Crush 3D Deadliest Warrior: Ancient Combat	11	12	13	14
15	16 MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. DAY	17 Grand Slam Tennis 2 Order Up!	18	19	20	21
22	23	24 Silent Hill Collection The Sims 3 Master Suite Stuff Pack	25	26 SEE PAGE 24	27	28
29	30	31 Final Fantasy XIII-2 NeverDead SoulCalibur V Starhawk				

If you want to keep tabs on all of the pre-order specials that Best Buy and game publishers have put together, just scan this QR code with your smartphone. One webpage will tell all!

ALL GAME NAMES ARE LISTED ON THEIR RESPECTIVE RELEASE DATES. LISTINGS SUBJECT TO CHANGE WITHOUT NOTICE. FOR MORE INFO, GO TO BESTBUY.COM
TO SUBSCRIBE TO THE @GAMER PODCAST, GO TO ATGAMERPODCAST.COM

FEBRUARY 2012

■ Game Release Date ■ The @GAMER Podcast ↘ This day in videogame history... ↘ Hardware

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
ARE YOU A PRE-ORDER PRO? If you want to keep tabs on all of the pre-order specials that Best Buy and game publishers have put together, just scan this QR code with your smartphone. One webpage will tell all!		SEE PAGE 21	01 Combat Wings: The Great Battles of WWII	02 GROUNDHOG DAY	03 THE @GAMER PODCAST, EPISODE 34	04
05	06 ▫ Zumba Fitness Rush	07 ▫ Combat Wings: The Great Battles of WWII ▫ Fallout New Vegas Ultimate Edition ▫ Inversion ▫ Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning ▫ Resident Evil Revelations ▫ The Darkness II	08	09	10	11
12	13	14 ▫ Binary Domain ▫ Mario & Sonic/London 2012 Olympic Games ▫ Rayman Origins (PS Vita) ▫ SSX ▫ Tales of the Abyss ▫ Test Drive: Ferrari Legend VALENTINES DAY Continued	15 Rayman Origins	16	17	18
19	20 PRESIDENT'S DAY	21 ▫ Asura's Wrath ▫ Syndicate	22 ▫ Army Corps of Hell ▫ ModNation Racers ▫ Ultimate Marvel vs. Capcom 3 (PS Vita) ▫ Uncharted: Golden Abyss ↘ PS Vita Hardware: 3G and Wi-Fi	23	24	25
26	27	28 ▫ Mortal Kombat (PS Vita) ▫ Tekken 3D: Prime Edition	29			

02/14 Continued ■ The Sims 3 Hidden Springs ■ Twisted Metal ■ UFC Undisputed 3

ALL GAME NAMES ARE LISTED ON THEIR RESPECTIVE RELEASE DATES. LISTINGS SUBJECT TO CHANGE WITHOUT NOTICE. FOR MORE INFO, GO TO BESTBUY.COM
TO SUBSCRIBE TO THE @GAMER PODCAST, GO TO ATGAMERPODCAST.COM

MAX PAYNE 3

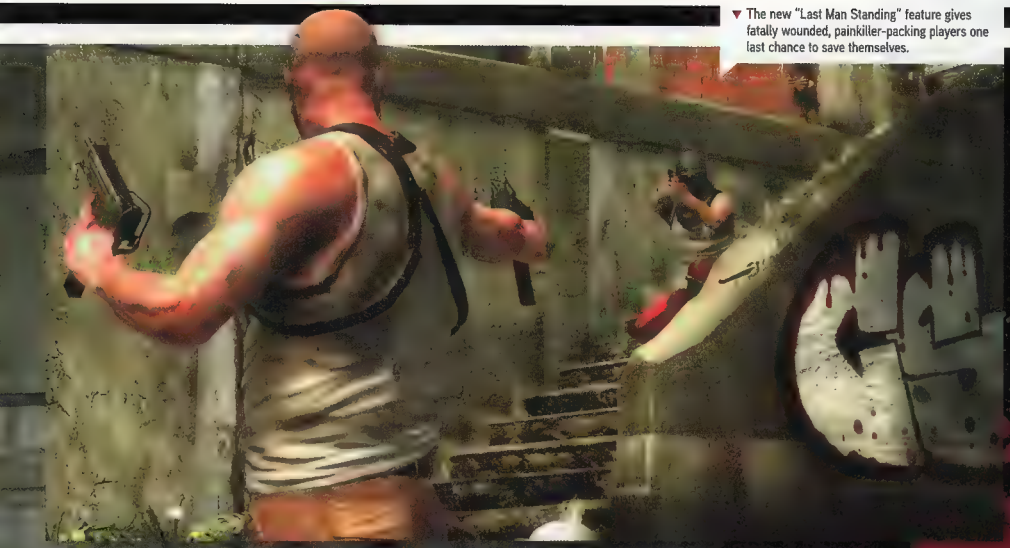
Bald, bearded, and badder than ever •

The long-awaited follow-up to last generation's defining film-noir shooter franchise, Max Payne 3, has garnered more attention for its titular protagonist's makeover than anything else. Sporting a scruffy face and shorn scalp, the pill-popping NYPD detective is nearly unrecognizable in the new game.

Trading the property's seedy New York City setting for the sun-baked beauty of Brazil, the sequel's also making significant changes to the series's signature backdrop. Despite these seemingly drastic departures, though, Max's third outing is bringing the Payne like never before. Rockstar's demo, which found a depressed and drunken Max off the police force and reluctantly accepting a private security gig in South America, drove this fact home like a hollow-point to the head.

Dressed in a dirty white tank top and khaki cargo pants, a more-muscular-than-I-remember Max is tasked with protecting a buddy's girlfriend from an armed-to-the-gills group of paramilitary goons in an abandoned bus depot. What unfolds over the next few minutes is a knuckle-whitening, cinematic action sequence that would have John Woo frantically scribbling notes. Liberally leveraging the franchise's returning slow-motion mechanic, Max unloads clips and dives through the environment—often headfirst—with the grace of a bullet-spraying ballerina; bus windows explode into storms of flying glass, dirt kicks up from the dusty ground, gas pumps blow up real good, and many a meatbag is introduced to flurries of bone-shattering projectiles before dying dramatic deaths. So, yeah, bullet time is back and better than ever. Additionally, a "final kill" camera—an evolution of the previous games' bullet cam—caps each action-ratcheting scene with an especially pleasing finisher. On top of ending heart-racing hot lead exchanges with memorable kills, the effect conveniently lets you know the coast is clear.

While my time with Max Payne 3 was strictly hands off, it effectively reassured me that the franchise's defining traits are intact. From gritty storytelling and cinematic gunplay, to the anti-hero's haunting history and knack for attracting trouble, it left no doubt as to whether it was remaining true to the series's hard-boiled heart. More than just zipping up my concerns in a body bag, though, it left my trigger fingers instinctively twitching in anticipation of Max's early 2012 arrival.



▼ The new "Last Man Standing" feature gives fatally wounded, painkiller-packing players one last chance to save themselves.

NICE MOVES, MAX \\ Not since witnessing Nathan Drake realistically trek through treacherous environments have I been so impressed by a character's nuanced animations. Utilizing a combination of Rockstar's proprietary RAGE engine and Natural Motion's Euphoria tech, Max's dynamic movements are a stunning achievement. On top of the detailed motions driving his shifting weight, he braces himself for falls, builds momentum with incredible realism, and even sports a full range of motion when prone.

DUCK AND DRUG \\

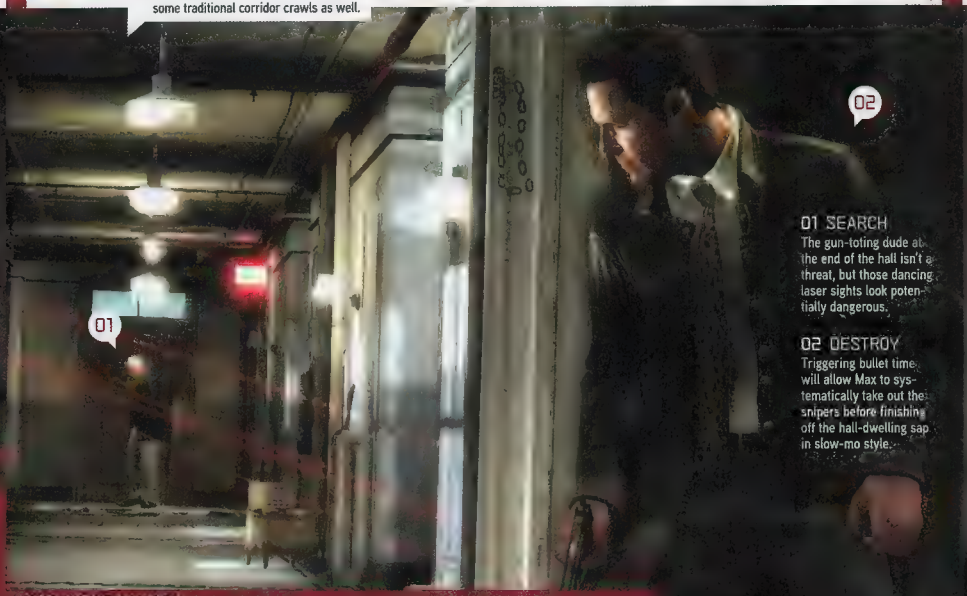
[redacted] fatalities. While also [redacted] other [redacted] be familiar to fans [redacted] Bullet Time. For the first time, the series [redacted] gives you the option to use cover. The game's bullet-time feature sits [redacted] course of a run-and-gun approach [redacted] Rockstar felt adding a sticky [redacted] system [redacted] your character [redacted] option [redacted] would add more realism [redacted] depth to the [redacted] fights. On the flip side, you won't be able to [redacted] this mechanic's fluid and magical [redacted] infringe on your enemy's time [redacted] in the first two games, Max will need to pick up and chomp on painkillers to keep his [redacted] meter from reaching the red zone.

Max can't fly, but you'd never know it considering how much time he spends in this air-catching pose. Guess that bald head is aerodynamic.

▲ You can carry a pair of hand-cannons as well as a larger two-handed weapon—all death-dealers are realistically rendered on Max in-game.

◀ MAX'S MENACES
In addition to the usual Mafioso meatheads, Max will encounter a variety of more sophisticated—and better-equipped—bad guys.

▼ On top of Sao Paulo's more open environments, *Max Payne 3* features some traditional corridor crawls as well.



01 SEARCH
The gun-toting dude at the end of the hall isn't a threat, but those dancing laser sights look potentially dangerous.

02 DESTROY
Triggering bullet time will allow Max to systematically take out the snipers before finishing off the hall-dwelling sap in slow-mo style.

IT'S STORYTIME!

Gather round, kids.

SOUTH AMERICA NOIR

While filling fools full of holes takes center stage, Max Payne 3 still finds time to spin a dramatic yarn. Sticking close to its film noir roots, it uses a variety of methods to tell its well-paced tale; motion comics, cut-scenes, and Max's monologues combine to get both your heart and trigger fingers throbbing in time. Of course, it doesn't hurt that veteran Payne voice actor, James McCaffrey, gives weight to Max's waxing.

TWISTY TIMELINE

While much of the demo took place in a Sao Paulo bus graveyard, I got more than a teasing look at some other promising areas. During an earlier portion of the game, I witnessed Max—back in NYC and looking like he did in the previous games—paint the walls of his decrepit apartment building with the blood and guts of mafia thugs. A later scene, which sees him bearded, but with a full head of hair, finds him in a posh office complex owned by his new employer. The building, infiltrated by a literal army of baddies, serves as the perfect setpiece for the game's blockbuster-rivaling shootouts. Filled with destructible items—furniture, cubicles, plate glass, paperwork—the environment is like a playground for Max's brand of choreographed chaos. Needless to say, it's filled with more corpses than office supplies by the time he finishes with it.

▲ The pulse-pounding action occasionally takes a breather to tell a dramatically driven tale to rival any big-screen crime thriller.

MAX'S MATRIX-LIKE [illegible]

Bullet time automatically regenerates while Max is shooting or being shot—so, pretty much always.

On top of the player-controlled bullet time, the game occasionally auto-triggers a slow-mo effect during particularly cinematic moments.

◀ SHOWER TIME
Graphically detailed blood, sweat, and dirt dynamically generate on Max as he progresses through the game.

MAX PAYNE 3 STILL FINDS TIME TO SPIN A DRAMATIC YARN

PS3 XBOX360 PC

GAME DETAILS

RATING PENDING RP

ESRB

MAX PAYNE 3

INFO
Publisher: Rockstar Games
Developer: Rockstar Studios
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PC

RELEASE DATE
March 2012

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Yes, but details TBD

GENRE
Third-person shooter

SUITABLE FOR
Players who enjoy savoring each head-exploding kill

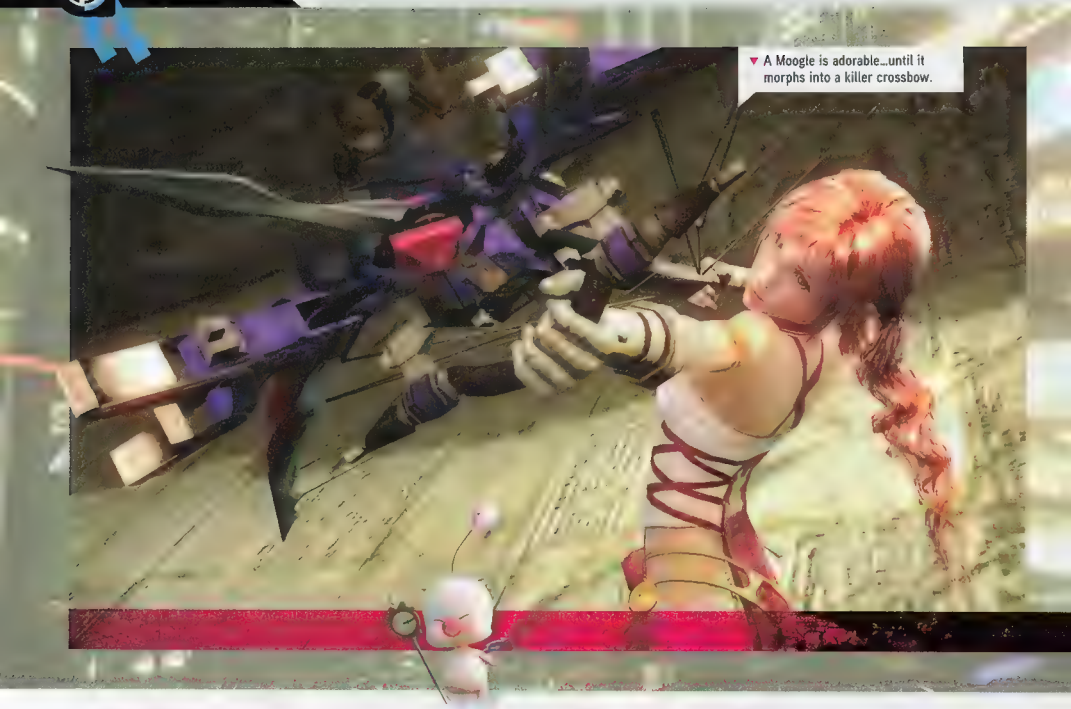
NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!
F.E.A.R. 3's bullet time-like slow-mo ability should prepare you for slaying with style in *Max Payne 3*.

WANT MORE? SCAN THIS!

Scan the QR code with your smartphone to watch the official trailer for *Max Payne 3*.

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Bullet time is better than ever
- ❤ Stunning character animations
- ❤ Oozing crime noir vibe

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Does the current generation of gamers even know who Max Payne is?



▼ A Moogle is adorable...until it morphs into a killer crossbow.

FINAL FANTASY XIII-2

Channel your inner crystal...

• Words: Andy Eddy

Okay, it's confession time: I played *Final Fantasy XIII* for over 70 hours. For this preview, I put in over five hours on *Final Fantasy XIII-2*. Yet I feel like I just scratched the surface, so I'm probably looking at a similarly lengthy time sucker. Considering the sequel comes out on January 31, I should probably just call in sick right now, for all of February.

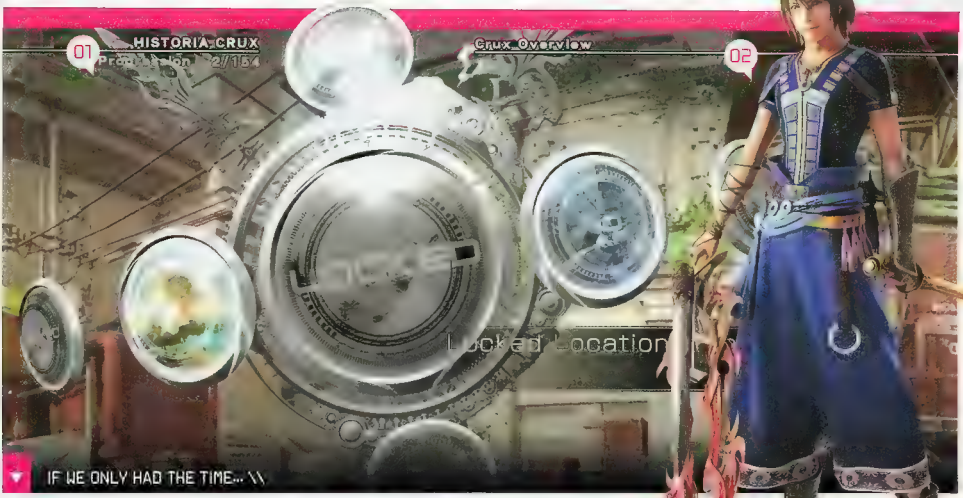
The new game picks up three years after the events at the end of *FFXIII*, so it's a true sequel (that's why it's called *Final Fantasy XIII-2* instead of *Final Fantasy XIV*). In the time I played, I saw some friendly faces (Lightning and Serah, primarily) in some well-known locations (Pulse and Cocoon), and heard some familiar names (such as Fang, Vanille, and Snow—all of whom were only talked about, though Snow was shown in flashbacks). I was quickly introduced to a new main character, Noel Kreiss, who ends up on Pulse helping the NORA gang fight off the myriad murderous monsters that have suddenly started appearing in the wake of a meteorite that's crashed nearby.

After facing off against some nasty creatures, the new combat party of Noel and Serah discovers a glowing portal. Powering it up with one of the "artefacts" discovered in the vicinity, they set out for whatever new location the gate will take them, soon realizing that the portal is in fact a "time gate." I expect that the game will take the party through a lot of past, present, and future locations, given that you're tasked with finding 160 artefacts during your travels.

If you played *FFXIII*, you'll find yourself in comfortable territory here. The gist of the Active Time Battle System is still in place, though with some notable additions (see the "What's New?" sidebar) that should make it even more versatile—at least once you adequately set up your Paradigms to cover the number of battle styles you'll need to defeat the different monsters that'll attack you in the course of the game. And the gamemakers seem to have added a lot of side quests, so the game isn't as linear as its predecessor (a complaint some reviewers made about *FFXIII*).

If *FFXIII-2* is going to be a fresh start for you, understand that there's a steep learning curve, so it might be a good plan to go back and play *FFXIII* first. That said, there are ample interactive tutorials to learn from, as well as an extensive wealth of information contained in the encyclopedic Datalog.

Mostly, though, I found it to be as you'd expect, with lots of fantastic action, incredibly good-looking characters and environments, and engaging battles as often as you want to engage in them. Now excuse me...I have some ruins to rummage through.

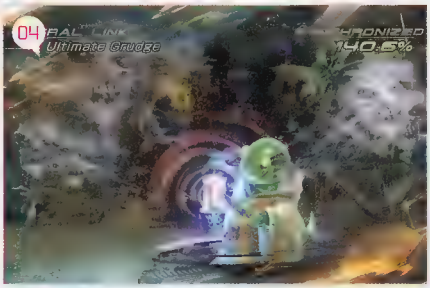


01 TIME-TRIPPIN'
Once you've accessed a period in time, the Historia Crux enables you to visit it again.

02 NOEL WAY OUT
He says he's come from the future to help Serah, and that he'll protect her at every turn. Yeah, right!

03 MOVIE-LIKE
Cinematic Action scenes are "quick time events"—you gain power the faster you hit the buttons.

04 MONSTER SHOT
A special attack from a monster in your party works much like a "Cinematic Action" move.



WHAT'S NEW? \\

Returning FFXIII players will find many familiar aspects; such as the combat process, Paradigms, and building characters with the Crystarium. Still, Square Enix has built upon them in a few ways:

- Cinematic Action should keep you alert—during what might seem to be a cut-scene, you may be prompted for some quick button or stick moves to trigger key interactions.
- Some battles reward you with a crystal, which holds the essence of the monster you just beat. Add up to three monsters to your party and use their skills in your paradigms.
- Live Trigger segments offer dialogue options, so you can control the direction of the conversation.

PS3 XBOX 360

GAME DETAILS

HANDS-ON

FINAL FANTASY XIII-2

INFO
Publisher: Square Enix
Developer: Square Enix
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360

RELEASE DATE
January 31, 2012

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Single-player only

GENRE
RPG

SUITABLE FOR
FF-anatics who crave more Pulse and Cocoon adventures

FREE EXCLUSIVE OFFER
Pre order *Final Fantasy XIII-2* now and you'll get a collectible hardcover *FFXIII* novella (while supplies last).

▲ *Final Fantasy XIII-2* starts off with Lightning in a couple of fierce battles in and around Valhalla.

▲ The Valhalla skyline in more serene times—and not what you see a little while after the game begins.

Lightning
She starred in *FFXIII*; here, finding her is a primary objective.

I SHOULD CALL IN SICK NOW FOR ALL OF FEBRUARY

WANT MORE? SCAN THIS!

Scan the QR code with your smartphone to watch the official trailer for *Final Fantasy XIII-2*.

LIGHTNING STRIKES TWICE?

In *Final Fantasy XIII*, Lightning was a playable character, trying to save her sister Serah from an eternal life as a post-l'Cie crystal. Now, in *Final Fantasy XIII-2*, Serah is one of the playable characters, in search of her missing sister. My, how fortunes change in games.

Before the sun set on my short time in a place called Valhalla, I got to meet Noel Kreiss, a mysterious time traveller who Lightning sends off to find Serah. She gives him a Moogle as a "good-luck charm" (though the cute creature can convert into a powerful crossbow, which Serah puts to good use not long after), then off he goes...at which point you're left with a bit of a mystery: What's happened to Valhalla and Lightning? Sorry...no spoilers from us just yet.

▲ Serah is shocked when Noel says he met Lightning recently, and she wants to know all the details.

▲ ...driving and her trusty Eidolon steed. Can't wait to see them ripping through the sky again.

WHAT'S GREAT:

- ❤ The Active Time Battle System is even more versatile
- ❤ This is one great-looking game

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:

- ✖ The battle system is incredibly complex, still requiring some trial-and-error—and frequent try/fail/try again—combat against bigger enemies
- ✖ This is one weird storyline

▲ Hope you've got Kenny Loggins' "Danger Zone" on your iPod.

COMBAT WINGS: THE GREAT BATTLES OF WWII

Blows flight sims outta the sky • Words: Matt Cabral

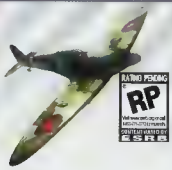
Arcadey action and historical accuracy generally don't play nice in games. That's why titles strictly adhering to history are often relegated to the cerebral strategy genre, while shooters usually craft whatever fiction best complements their Bruckheimer-like setpieces. That, however, isn't stopping City Interactive from pairing WWII's greatest aerial melees with accessible, thumb-blistering action in *Combat Wings: The Great Battles of WWII*.

Forgoing flight-sim controls in favor of pick-up-and-play mechanics, the title promises the thrills of an adrenaline-spiking shooter and the narrative authenticity of a History Channel documentary. The former is handled with forgiving, uncomplicated gamepad inputs that are supported by Ace Mode, a temporary player-assisting ability that ratchets the drama. On top of sporting controls that'll hurt the thumbs more than the brain, *Combat Wings*'s explosive presentation is seen from a cinematic third-person perspective, rather than the standard cockpit view adopted by many flight-combat games.

While the bombs and bullets fly at a rate that rivals *Call of Duty*, the battles remain grounded in WWII history. Unfolding through four separate campaigns—from American, Russian, British, and Australian perspectives—the story puts you behind the controls of over 50 detail-drenched planes; taking to the skies in authentic Allies and Axis crafts (though you always play the former role), you'll tackle bombing runs, escort missions, ground assaults, and white-knuckle dogfights, all based on actual WWII engagements. Advanced particle and physics effects further up the immersion—and adrenaline—delivering realistic smoke, flying debris, and sky-illuminating explosions.

Those looking for a WWII game that doesn't sacrifice action for authenticity—or vice versa—will want to grab the throttle when *Combat Wings* dive bombs onto consoles and PC early next year.

GAME DETAILS



COMBAT WINGS: THE GREAT BATTLES OF WWII

INFO
Publisher: City Interactive
Developer: City Interactive
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PC

RELEASE DATE
February 7, 2012

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
2-player splitscreen co-op (online TBD)

GENRE
Flight combat

SUITABLE FOR
Aerial combat fans who prefer gamepads to flight sticks

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!

2009's Heroes Over Europe attempted to deliver a similar mix of history and heart-racing combat.

WANT MORE? SCAN THIS!

Scan the QR code with your smartphone to watch the official trailer for *Combat Wings*.

GAMEPLAY

▲ The PS3 version supports Move controls for an even smoother soaring experience.

▲ Downing targets is rewarded with smoking metallic husks, hurtling shrapnel, and flaming jet fuel.

WHAT'S GREAT:
- Based on actual WWII engagements
- Pick-up-and-play controls
- Cinematic presentation

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- Does the WWII setting have any life left in it?

PLANETSIDE 2

How about some MMO in your FPS? • Words: Evan Shamoon

Any game developer looking seriously at the challenges of making an MMOFPS is going to end up a little overwhelmed," says Matt Higby, creative director of the upcoming *PlanetSide 2*—itself a fusion of the two most popular acronyms (and genres) in all of gaming. "I wouldn't be surprised if, after *PlanetSide 2* ships, we start seeing a flood of this type of game on the market. Once people see the fulfilled promise of the [genre], it may become the 'next big thing' in gaming."

Indeed, Higby's game takes the best aspects from the disparate worlds of "massively multiplayer online game" (MMO) and "first-person shooter" (FPS), and attempts to merge them into the ultimate online shooter. "The type of experiences you can have in *PlanetSide 2* are unmatched in gaming," Higby says. "You're coordinating massive battles with hundreds of players, and then you're engaging in those battles with fast-paced, visceral FPS combat. It's the world's biggest FPS and the world's most action-packed MMO, all in one."

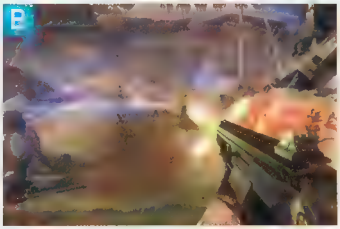
While the original *PlanetSide* (which came out in 2003) had loads of potential, it never quite took hold of the predominant audience of either genre. With the sequel, *PlanetSide* vets will immediately notice a fully revamped engine powering the experience. "Obviously, we have to have a totally cutting-edge FPS engine, [and so] we created Forgelight, an engine that is capable of creating some incredible visuals and epic battles," Higby says.

But for the uninitiated, how does the moment-to-moment gameplay compare to that of top shooters, such as *Battlefield 3* or *Modern Warfare 3*? "In terms of pacing, we're not as quick for TTK (time to kill) as either," Higby says. "In terms of atmosphere, I'd put us on par with *Battlefield 3*—but much, much larger." Where those games require evenly matched teams for a successful session, *PlanetSide* is meant to scale. "[Those games] are built around team balance for you to have fun, whereas in *PlanetSide 2*, you can have an awesome time in a 10-on-100 battle, if you play it right."

BUILDING A BETTER BOAT

PlanetSide 2's engine has been in

▲ First thing you'll want to buy yourself: a nice, hard helmet. Preferably with the works.



A SHOP AND POP

PlanetSide 2 will be free-to-play, with a cash shop that will sell items geared toward customization—not things to make players more powerful.

B LESS DOWNTIME

"Pacing is faster in gameplay and the downtime between battles," Higby says. "We get you into fights quicker and with less time travelling."

C WHO RUNS THIS?

PlanetSide 2 features territory control in an open world, with battles featuring hundreds of players on foot and in vehicles, on land and sea.

D FACTION ACTION

Like the original, *PlanetSide 2* revolves around the efforts of three factions as they fight for territorial control of the planet Auraxis.

TO TWITCH OR NOT TO TWITCH
Mech Turtleneck
As Wu Tang's always said, "best protect ya neck." And your face.
Fashion Forward
Chunky boots are SO in! Get customized kicks at the cash shop.

GAME DETAILS

PLANETSIDE 2

INFO
Publisher: Sony Online Entertainment
Developer: Sony Online Entertainment
Platforms: PC

RELEASE DATE
2012

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Massively multiplayer

GENRE
MMOFPS

SUITABLE FOR
MMO enthusiasts, FPS fanatics

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!
The original *PlanetSide*—or, if you want to go way back to the MMOFPS genre's roots, the 2002 PC game *Neocron*.

WANT MORE? SCAN THIS!

Scan the QR code with your smartphone to watch the official trailer for *PlanetSide 2*.

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Looks to act on the vast potential of the original, with better graphics and gameplay

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Business model is still largely under wraps
- ✖ PC-only...for now

NEVER DEAD

Heads will roll... • Words: Matt Cabral

Like most protagonists granted with the gift of immortality, *NeverDead*'s demon-hunting hero just wants to rest in peace. No, not a good night's sleep, but a full-time dirt nap. Bryce Boltzmann's wife was murdered at the hands of Hades's minions 500 years prior to the game's start, leaving him to shoulder the tragic event's psychological baggage for all eternity. Thankfully, the demonic buggers that simultaneous gave him everlasting life and took away his reason to live have returned, providing him with the perfect reason to stop moping and start massacring.

With the baddies back, Bryce sets out to exact revenge and send the sinister little suckers back whence they came. Armed with bullets and blades, the impossible-to-kill protagonist can deal death with cinematic style from a familiar third-person perspective. However, filling beasts full of smoking holes and introducing them to sharp steel aren't his preferred methods of eliminating evildoers. You see, Bryce's invincibility allows him to get creative when it comes to reducing netherworld nasties to pulpy puddles. He can toss and detonate his limbs, roll his head like a bowling ball, and channel electricity and fire through his torso.

Mixing traditional weapons with, say, the ability to tear off his arm and chuck it like a grenade makes for some satisfying and strategically minded combat. During my demo, I took on a pack of demon dogs with a pair of pistols and, of course, Bryce's explosive appendages. With a press of the left bumper I lobbed one of his limbs as bait; when the possessed pups flocked to the fresh meat, I detonated the explosive arm and cleaned up the remaining mess with hollow-points.

On top of making for a macabre arsenal, Bryce's neat trick yields lots of eye-pleasing effects. You can drag a legless Bryce around the environment, steer his decapitated head about, and even regrow his limbs. *NeverDead*'s approach to third-person action is far from the lock-and-load formula we've come to expect from the genre, but based on my brief demo, I'm looking forward to losing my head (and various other body parts) again soon.

VULNERABLE VIXEN \\

Bryce partners with Arcadia, a pistol-packing woman who shares his hatred for demonic menaces. While she can hold her own against the underworld hordes, she's not invincible like Bryce. So, while you can't technically die as the immortal hero, you will fail if Arcadia doesn't survive.

Despite the serious demon-apocalypse storyline, Bryce and Arcadia share plenty of playful banter.
Need a hand? You can retrieve lost limbs or opt to sprout a new one. Handy!

USE YOUR HEAD

Bryce's unique decapitation and regenerative skills do more than bring the pain and creep you out. His removable head can explore, reaching areas otherwise inaccessible to a full-bodied Bryce. Additionally, his ability to serve as a conduit for fire and electricity can help decipher puzzles and pass obstacles.

GAMEPLAY

▲ *NeverDead*'s ugly demons come in all shapes and sizes, but none are ever happy to see you.

▲ The fluid sword- and gunplay is complemented by intuitive defensive strafing and evasion maneuvers.

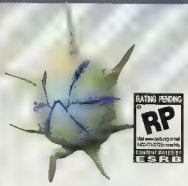
▲ The evolving relationship between Bryce and Arcadia promises to play a prominent role in the narrative.

DEMONIC DESTRUCTION

You can't fill the world with rampaging demon dogs without a little mess. *NeverDead* doesn't disappoint in this regard, delivering lots of environmental destruction and explosions. On top of enemies tearing the metropolis a new one, you can use the world as a weapon. By bringing down fire escapes—or the entire building they're attached to—you can eliminate threats without worrying about your heroes becoming collateral damage.

PS3 XBOX360

GAME DETAILS



NEVERDEAD

INFO
Publisher: Konami
Developer: Rebellion
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360

RELEASE DATE
January 31, 2012

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Up to 4-player co-op or competitive online

GENRE
Action

SUITABLE FOR
Those who like to use their heads—literally—in action games

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!

Stubbs the Zombie will get you comfortable with using your body as a weapon.

WANT MORE? SCAN THIS!

Scan the QR code with your smartphone to watch the official trailer for *NeverDead*.

WHAT'S GREAT:
- Using Bryce's body parts to kill
- Solving puzzles with your decapitated head
- Destructible environments

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- Will its unique concept be more gimmicky than game-changing?

SNIPER ELITE V2

505 Games and Rebellion put World War II in their crosshairs again Words: Andy Eddy

When *Sniper Elite V2* comes out this spring, it'll be yet another shooter to employ a World War II setting. However, the companies behind it hope that this trip to 1945 Berlin will distinguish itself from that crowd by employing a number of interesting gameplay components.

(By the way, don't mistake 505 Games's *Sniper Elite V2* with the *Sniper: Ghost Warrior* series that City Interactive publishes. The two series are unrelated...though a *Ghost Warrior* sequel coming in March should raise the confusion level a bit more.)

At its core, *SEV2* will provide many of the standard features you'd expect from such a game: a full ballistics system in which bullet trajectory is affected by distance and wind; a gameplay mechanic where the shooter's heartbeat will have an effect on targeting, etc. To build on what it created in *Sniper Elite*'s 2005 debut, developer Rebellion is adding other elements that it hopes will up the excitement.

REBELLION IS ADDING OTHER ELEMENTS TO UP THE EXCITEMENT

It will have a dynamic camera that'll give you the best perspective based on your location, movement, and posture. And the level design relies heavily on historical reference material, so the environments that you move through will be authentic to actual WWII battlefields.

It'll also offer a number of indicators to give you feedback on the enemy. Tagging enemies from a distance enables you to track them and relays helpful info on those targets. You'll also see color-coded markers to show how aware nearby enemies might be to your presence.

One of the coolest features lets you see a ghostly image of yourself, which is a visual cue as to where the enemy thinks you are based on a few factors—where you were last seen, where your last shot came from, etc. It alerts you to their awareness, but can also be used strategically when they come looking for you at that spot.

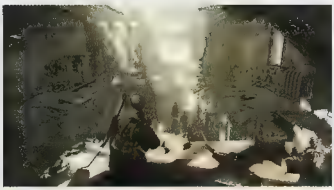
Rebellion says it's trying to stay true to the original, but that it's a tough mission to undertake. My demo revealed the potential of a game that bangs strategy, patience, and anxiety together to generate some bright sparks. Whether they'll catch fire with gamers is yet to be seen.

GORE-AY'S ANATOMY

One of *Sniper Elite V2*'s most stunning components is the "X-Ray Kill-Cam." On a particularly damaging shot, your perspective changes to show the bullet spinning from the rifle barrel to begin its flight. When the bullet is about to hit, you get a sudden change to a slow-mo, X-ray–like perspective of the target as the bullet cuts through flesh and bone in excrutiating detail—it seems a pretty realistic presentation of the wounds that a sniper's victim suffers. Hopefully it will only be an occasional "reward" for an extremely well-aimed shot.

The Russians
You should avoid telling him it looks like he's wearing his mom's apron.
The Germans
It's your chance to disprove the idea of a "home field advantage."

If you're looking for a challenge worthy of the "Elite" part of the game's title, you'll want to play in the "super-hard difficulty" that Rebellion is putting together. In this mode, you can't tag enemies, so you won't get helpful indicators that factor in how the bullet will drop over the shot's distance. Nor will you enjoy the onscreen visuals that show you the effect of your character's heartbeat on your aim. In other words... it'll be more like you're a real-life sniper.



The game's visuals are stunning, showing the desolation that World War II has left in its wake.

It may be billed as a "sniper" game, but there's plenty of waiting out nearby enemies and close-quarters gunfights.

ADRENALIZING ACTION

**DANCE, SNIPER MAN, DANCE ** This image should set aside any fears that it's just about camping remote perches and sparse action. No, my demo proved that there's a lot of opportunity for frantic battles as you traverse the terrain. It's far from a plodding experience...and if you want guaranteed kills, you'll need to take more risk to get in closer proximity.

PS3 XBOX 360 PC

GAME DETAILS

SNIPER ELITE V2

INFO
Publisher: 505 Games
Developer: Rebellion
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PC

RELEASE DATE
Spring 2012

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Yes, but no details yet

GENRE
Shooter

SUITABLE FOR
Armchair surgeons who prefer a scope to a scalpel

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!
Operation Flashpoint: Red River, while set in the present day, is a shooter with great tactical action and smooth pacing.

Scan the QR code with your smartphone to watch the official trailer for *Sniper Elite V2*.

- ❤ Displaying your "ghost" (where the enemy thinks you are) is a cool gameplay mechanic
- ❤ "X-Ray Kill-Cam" is an exciting conclusion—though the faint-of-heart may disagree

- ✖ Having faster-paced shooter sections might rub some methodical players the wrong way

GAME OF THRONES

An RPG of Ice and Fire • Nicolas Eyan Shannon

Over seven years ago, a small game developer contacted George R. R. Martin—writer of the series of fantasy novels, *A Song of Ice and Fire*—to see if he would be interested in letting them work on the series's licensed videogames. "At the time, his saga was not as well known as it is today, but we'd been fans since the first hour," says Thomas Veauclin, project manager at Cyanide Studios in Paris. Though it didn't happen immediately, several years later Martin gave Cyanide the go-ahead to develop two completely different games: a strategy title with the team at Cyanide Montreal, and an RPG with the team at Cyanide Paris.

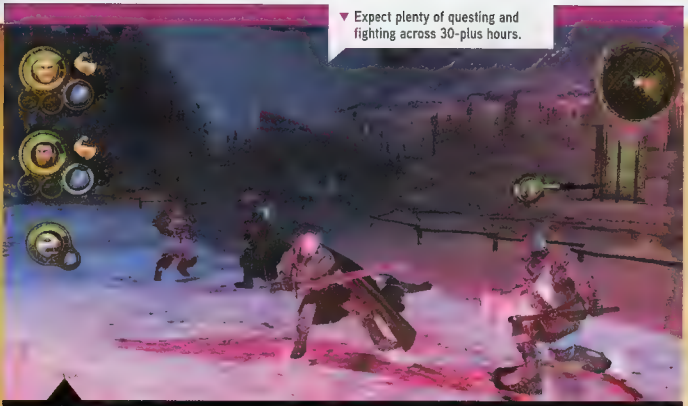
The RPG, titled simply *Game of Thrones*, is the biggest project in Cyanide's history. "There's nothing accidental or inadvertent about our approach for this genre," Veauclin says, who cites the classic *Planescape: Torment* as a primary source of inspiration. "We created numerous prototypes to help us define a style and overall design. One thing was certain: We wanted a story of great importance for the player."

The team knew it wanted to offer a new story, rather than simply retelling the books in videogame form. "For us, it was unthinkable to do a game based exactly on the story of the books—or even the HBO series, which didn't exist when we started development," Veauclin says. The developers worked with Martin on a spin-off story, which runs parallel to the first volume of the book series. "We obviously couldn't make any changes to the original work, but we could write between the lines of the first book, filling out a gap of the story and developing a narrative that revolves around one of the main themes of the first volume: Robert Baratheon's illegitimate children!"

The game's cinematic cut-scenes will allow you to choose the direction of the quests. Character progression, combat, and exploration will be key, with accrued experience unlocking abilities and skills, building characteristics and weapon proficiencies, and earning special talents. Standard roleplaying fare, to be sure, but if the narrative wrapping is up to snuff, it may very well be enough.

GOING BIG

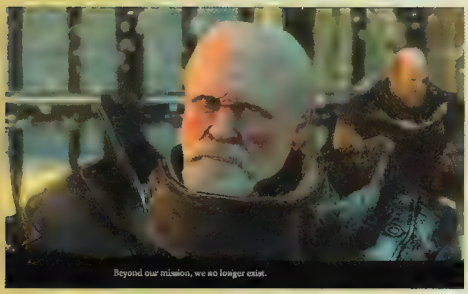
In truth, the success of *GoT* may well determine Cyanide Paris's fate. "We're not putting 200 people on each project, we didn't have four years to develop the game," Veauclin says. "We've developed but a few console games and almost no RPGs. Still, we knew what we wanted to do, we had a vision, and guess what? We did it!" Godspeed.



▼ Expect plenty of questing and fighting across 30-plus hours.

THE ACTIVE SLOWDOWN TACTICAL COMBAT ENGINE \\

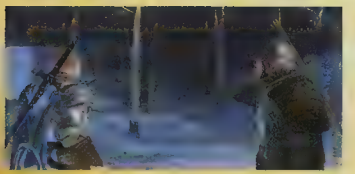
At any time during combat, you can slow time for an unlimited period. This allows you to select skills within your skill wheels. Your character will automatically perform the action you've selected, including moving toward a targeted opponent for any attack; each controllable character possesses his own ability wheel, and you can instantly swap between them and your main character at any time. "The fact that time can only be slowed increases the intensity and risk factor in combat, which really reflects the more realistic, gritty nature of the fantasy and politics in *Game of Thrones*," Veauclin says. "Every second counts!"



Beyond our mission, we no longer exist.

THE HORSE'S MOUTH

GoT has some mighty big shoes to fill, and fortunately, Cyanide got help from the source. "George [R.R. Martin] has been instrumental in helping us capture the right spirit," Veauclin says. "We discussed with him our ideas, our main scenario, and drew upon his feedback in crafting the unique story and its overall tone." HBO has been involved as well, allowing the developer to incorporate a number of assets and elements from the series, including the main theme and some actor likenesses.



▲ "We've worked extensively on the maturity and style of the dialogue, on properly capturing the history and tone of the series," Veauclin says.

▲ Cinematic cut-scenes give you the ability to make choices that have an impact on future quests...and whether or not your future head remains attached to your future neck.

GAME DETAILS

GAME OF THRONES

INFO
Publisher: Atlus
Developer: Cyanide
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PC

RELEASE DATE
Q1 2012

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Single-player only

GENRE
RPG

SUITABLE FOR
Fantasy fanatics, role-playing reservists, and Dragonborn

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!

One word: *Skyrim*. It's hard to play the game without thinking of *Game of Thrones*, and we mean that in the best way possible. Dragonborn!

WANT MORE? SCAN THIS!

Scan the QR code with your smartphone to go to the official website for *Game of Thrones*.

WHAT'S GREAT:
- Excellent story and characters to work with
- Has the blessing of George R.R. Martin

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- Very little of the game has been shown to press thus far
- After the HBO series, expectations are very high.

PUSH START ON A WHOLE NEW LEVEL

BEST BUY | rewardzone
GAMERS CLUB
[UNLOCKED]

Take your gaming to another level with Reward Zone® Gamers Club Unlocked from Best Buy®. For the price of this magazine subscription, you gain access to exclusive offers, discounts, bonus points and a full year-long subscription to @Gamer.

ALL FOR ONLY $14.99 PER YEAR.

See a Best Buy Gaming Specialist in store to join Reward Zone Gamers Club Unlocked today.

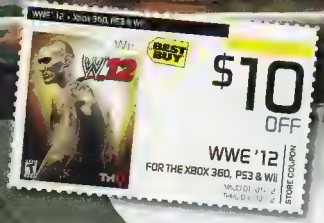
For Reward Zone Gamers Club Terms & Conditions, please visit MyRZ.com

BEST BUY | rewardzone
@GAMERS
[UNLOCKED]

EXCLUSIVE COUPONS FOR @GAMERS INSIDE!

$120 IN BEST BUY COUPONS

Score tremendous savings on these hit games and more:
WWE '12
Medal of Honor
Assassin's Creed Revelations



PRESENTED BY:
NATE, 498 – BELLEVUE, WA
BEST BUY EMPLOYEE

Keep the octagon, we all know that wrestling fans are some of the most rabid folks out there. With that in mind, we're stoked to offer you $10 off on the latest from THQ, WWE '12. Of course there's more than that. Shooter fans will no doubt love our $15 off coupon for Medal of Honor, while fans of the Assassin's Creed series will welcome saving $10 on Assassin's Creed Revelations.
And while you're in the store, don't forget to sign up for Best Buy's Reward Zone Gamers Club Unlocked so you never miss an issue.

$120 IN BEST BUY COUPONS

For PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, Wii, & more!

SEE PAGE 69

TEEN T

01 WWE '12

The popular franchise returns in an exciting new edition with WWE '12. With a new technology system you'll feel like you're truly in the ring with the most fluid, dynamic, realistic, and action-packed WWE simulation to date.

MATURE 17+

02 MEDAL OF HONOR

Medal of Honor leaves the historic battlefields of WWII and places you in modern-day Afghanistan as a Tier 1 Operator. Your objective is to undertake missions that no other soldier can handle.

MATURE 17+

03 ASSASSIN'S CREED REVELATIONS

Step into the role of Ezio Auditore in *Assassin's Creed Revelations*. In this final chapter of the trilogy, you'll protect Constantinople from the Templar forces and search for the origins of the ancient order by following in Altaïr's footsteps.

PRE-OWNED

MATURE 17+

04 PRE-OWNED CALL OF DUTY: BLACK OPS

In the follow-up to *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2*, the Cold War has ended and you are one of the few to know the secrets of the conflicts that persist. Complete the classified operations and quietly protect the nation.

PRE-OWNED

MATURE 17+

05 PRE-OWNED GEARS OF WAR 3

Gears of War 3 is the thrilling finale to the saga that has captivated millions. Experience the heart-pounding action exclusively on Xbox 360 and enjoy improved and explosive cooperative and competitive multiplayer action.

PRE-OWNED

MATURE 17+

06 PRE-OWNED CRYSIS 2

Planet Earth is in ruins and the aliens have returned to destroy NYC. Outfitted with the combat-enhancing Nanosuit 2, you can absorb devastating blows and delve into a flood of creatures not from this world.

07 ROCKETFISH WIRED OR WIRELESS GAMING HEADSET

Whether gaming on an Xbox 360, PlayStation 3 or PC, you can't beat a good gaming headset. That's where we come in. This month you can save $20 on any Rocketfish wired or wireless gaming headset.

PRE-OWNED

MATURE 17+

08 $10 OFF ANY PRE-OWNED GAME $29.99 OR ABOVE

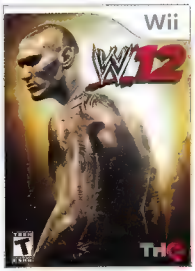
Take advantage of Best Buy's great new trade-in program and get a pre-owned game at an even lower price than before. Clip out this coupon to get a whopping $10 off the regular price of any pre-owned game at your local Best Buy.

$120 IN COUPONS

For PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, Wii, & more!

Save on these games when you use your Reward Zone® program membership card • Special Reward Zone® program Gamers Club offer. Get in on more great offers by joining now. Go to MyRewardZone.com/GamersClub

WWE '12 • PS3, Xbox 360 & Wii

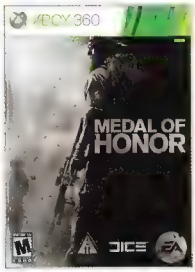


BEST BUY

$10 OFF

WWE '12
FOR PS3, XBOX 360 & Wii
VALID 01/01/12
THRU 03/03/12
STORE COUPON

Medal of Honor • PS3 & Xbox 360

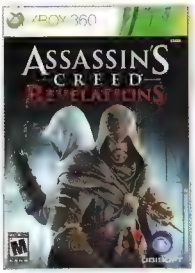


BEST BUY

$15 OFF

Medal of Honor
FOR PS3 & XBOX 360
VALID 01/01/12
THRU 03/03/12
STORE COUPON

Assassin's Creed Revelations • PS3 & Xbox 360



BEST BUY

$10 OFF

Assassin's Creed Revelations
FOR PS3 & XBOX 360
VALID 01/01/12
THRU 03/03/12
STORE COUPON

Pre-owned Call of Duty: Black Ops • PS3 & Xbox 360

BEST BUY

PRE-OWNED

$15 OFF

Pre-owned Call of Duty: Black Ops
FOR PS3 & XBOX 360
VALID 01/01/12
THRU 03/03/12
STORE COUPON

Pre-owned Gears of War 3 • Xbox 360

BEST BUY

PRE-OWNED

$20 OFF

Pre-owned Gears of War 3
FOR XBOX 360
VALID 01/01/12
THRU 03/03/12
STORE COUPON

Pre-owned Crysis 2 • PS3 & Xbox 360

BEST BUY

PRE-OWNED

$20 OFF

Pre-owned Crysis 2
FOR PS3 & XBOX 360
VALID 01/01/12
THRU 03/03/12
STORE COUPON

Rocketfish Wired or Wireless Gaming Headset

BEST BUY

$20 OFF

Rocketfish Wired or Wireless Gaming Headset
VALID 01/01/12
THRU 03/03/12
STORE COUPON

Any pre-owned game $29.99 or above

PRE-OWNED

BEST BUY

$10 OFF

Any pre-owned game $29.99 or above
VALID 01/01/12
THRU 03/03/12
STORE COUPON

$120 IN COUPONS

For PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, Wii, & more!

PROMOTIONAL - OFFER VALID 01/01/12 THRU 03/03/12

Customer: Must be a Reward Zone Gamers Club member to redeem coupon.

Cashier Instructions: Scan coupon UPC. Scan qualifying product UPC(s). Scan all other product(s) being sold. Scan Reward Zone program membership card. Press "Total." Write "VOID" on the coupon and place in the register coupon media file.

Markdowns taken from sale prices. Not valid when combined with other coupons or offers. Not valid on pre-owned games, unless the coupon is for a pre-owned game/s. Selection varies by store. Limit 1 offer per coupon, per household. Valid on in-store and in-stock items only. Valid only at Best Buy® stores in the U.S.A.; excludes stores in Puerto Rico. Online and in-store offer may vary. **Not valid on any BestBuy.com® order, including in-store pickup.** Best Buy® employees are not eligible for this promotion. No dealers. No copies. No cash back. No cash value. Coupon must be presented at time of purchase. © 2012 Best Buy.

SKU: 4570012

BEST BUY rewardzone GAMER

PROMOTIONAL - OFFER VALID 01/01/12 THRU 03/03/12

Customer: Must be a Reward Zone Gamers Club member to redeem coupon.

Cashier Instructions: Scan coupon UPC. Scan qualifying product UPC(s). Scan all other product(s) being sold. Scan Reward Zone program membership card. Press "Total." Write "VOID" on the coupon and place in the register coupon media file.

Markdowns taken from sale prices. Not valid when combined with other coupons or offers. Not valid on pre-owned games, unless the coupon is for a pre-owned game/s. Selection varies by store. Limit 1 offer per coupon, per household. Valid on in-store and in-stock items only. Valid only at Best Buy® stores in the U.S.A.; excludes stores in Puerto Rico. Online and in-store offer may vary. **Not valid on any BestBuy.com® order, including in-store pickup.** Best Buy® employees are not eligible for this promotion. No dealers. No copies. No cash back. No cash value. Coupon must be presented at time of purchase. © 2012 Best Buy.

SKU: 4570003

BEST BUY rewardzone GAMER

PROMOTIONAL - OFFER VALID 01/01/12 THRU 03/03/12

Customer: Must be a Reward Zone Gamers Club member to redeem coupon.

Cashier Instructions: Scan coupon UPC. Scan qualifying product UPC(s). Scan all other product(s) being sold. Scan Reward Zone program membership card. Press "Total." Write "VOID" on the coupon and place in the register coupon media file.

Markdowns taken from sale prices. Not valid when combined with other coupons or offers. Not valid on pre-owned games, unless the coupon is for a pre-owned game/s. Selection varies by store. Limit 1 offer per coupon, per household. Valid on in-store and in-stock items only. Valid only at Best Buy® stores in the U.S.A.; excludes stores in Puerto Rico. Online and in-store offer may vary. **Not valid on any BestBuy.com® order, including in-store pickup.** Best Buy® employees are not eligible for this promotion. No dealers. No copies. No cash back. No cash value. Coupon must be presented at time of purchase. © 2012 Best Buy.

SKU: 4570067

BEST BUY rewardzone GAMER

PROMOTIONAL - OFFER VALID 01/01/12 THRU 03/03/12

Customer: Must be a Reward Zone Gamers Club member to redeem coupon.

Cashier Instructions: Scan coupon UPC. Scan qualifying product UPC(s). Scan all other product(s) being sold. Scan Reward Zone program membership card. Press "Total." Write "VOID" on the coupon and place in the register coupon media file.

Markdowns taken from sale prices. Not valid when combined with other coupons or offers. Not valid on pre-owned games, unless the coupon is for a pre-owned game/s. Selection varies by store. Limit 1 offer per coupon, per household. Valid on in-store and in-stock items only. Valid only at Best Buy® stores in the U.S.A.; excludes stores in Puerto Rico. Online and in-store offer may vary. **Not valid on any BestBuy.com® order, including in-store pickup.** Best Buy® employees are not eligible for this promotion. No dealers. No copies. No cash back. No cash value. Coupon must be presented at time of purchase. © 2012 Best Buy.

SKU: 4570021

BEST BUY rewardzone GAMER

PROMOTIONAL - OFFER VALID 01/01/12 THRU 03/03/12

Customer: Must be a Reward Zone Gamers Club member to redeem coupon.

Cashier Instructions: Scan coupon UPC. Scan qualifying product UPC(s). Scan all other product(s) being sold. Scan Reward Zone program membership card. Press "Total." Write "VOID" on the coupon and place in the register coupon media file.

Markdowns taken from sale prices. Not valid when combined with other coupons or offers. Not valid on pre-owned games, unless the coupon is for a pre-owned game/s. Selection varies by store. Limit 1 offer per coupon, per household. Valid on in-store and in-stock items only. Valid only at Best Buy® stores in the U.S.A.; excludes stores in Puerto Rico. Online and in-store offer may vary. **Not valid on any BestBuy.com® order, including in-store pickup.** Best Buy® employees are not eligible for this promotion. No dealers. No copies. No cash back. No cash value. Coupon must be presented at time of purchase. © 2012 Best Buy.

SKU: 4570058

BEST BUY rewardzone GAMER

PROMOTIONAL - OFFER VALID 01/01/12 THRU 03/03/12

Customer: Must be a Reward Zone Gamers Club member to redeem coupon.

Cashier Instructions: Scan coupon UPC. Scan qualifying product UPC(s). Scan all other product(s) being sold. Scan Reward Zone program membership card. Press "Total." Write "VOID" on the coupon and place in the register coupon media file.

Markdowns taken from sale prices. Not valid when combined with other coupons or offers. Not valid on pre-owned games, unless the coupon is for a pre-owned game/s. Selection varies by store. Limit 1 offer per coupon, per household. Valid on in-store and in-stock items only. Valid only at Best Buy® stores in the U.S.A.; excludes stores in Puerto Rico. Online and in-store offer may vary. **Not valid on any BestBuy.com® order, including in-store pickup.** Best Buy® employees are not eligible for this promotion. No dealers. No copies. No cash back. No cash value. Coupon must be presented at time of purchase. © 2012 Best Buy.

SKU: 4570049

BEST BUY rewardzone GAMER

PROMOTIONAL - OFFER VALID 01/01/12 THRU 03/03/12

Customer: Must be a Reward Zone Gamers Club member to redeem coupon.

Cashier Instructions: Scan coupon UPC. Scan qualifying product UPC(s). Scan all other product(s) being sold. Scan Reward Zone program membership card. Press "Total." Write "VOID" on the coupon and place in the register coupon media file.

Markdowns taken from sale prices. Not valid when combined with other coupons or offers. Not valid on pre-owned games, unless the coupon is for a pre-owned game/s. Selection varies by store. Limit 1 offer per coupon, per household. Valid on in-store and in-stock items only. Valid only at Best Buy® stores in the U.S.A.; excludes stores in Puerto Rico. Online and in-store offer may vary. **Not valid on any BestBuy.com® order, including in-store pickup.** Best Buy® employees are not eligible for this promotion. No dealers. No copies. No cash back. No cash value. Coupon must be presented at time of purchase. © 2012 Best Buy.

SKU. 4570076

BEST BUY rewardzone GAMER

PROMOTIONAL - OFFER VALID 01/01/12 THRU 03/03/12

Customer: Must be a Reward Zone Gamers Club member to redeem coupon.

Cashier Instructions: Scan coupon UPC. Scan qualifying product UPC(s). Scan all other product(s) being sold. Scan Reward Zone program membership card. Press "Total." Write "VOID" on the coupon and place in the register coupon media file.

Markdowns taken from sale prices. Not valid when combined with other coupons or offers. Not valid on pre-owned games, unless the coupon is for a pre-owned game/s. Selection varies by store. Limit 1 offer per coupon, per household. Valid on in-store and in-stock items only. Valid only at Best Buy® stores in the U.S.A.; excludes stores in Puerto Rico. Online and in-store offer may vary. **Not valid on any BestBuy.com® order, including in-store pickup.** Best Buy® employees are not eligible for this promotion. No dealers. No copies. No cash back. No cash value. Coupon must be presented at time of purchase. © 2012 Best Buy.

SKU: 4569996

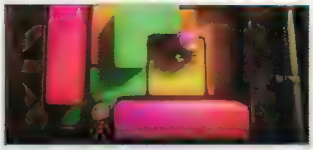
BEST BUY rewardzone GAMER

PlayStation Vita

↘ The new portable and launch games at a glance!

Launch Guide

Sony's next-gen portable successor to the PSP debuts in the U.S. on February 22, 2012. Are you ready? Here are our can't-miss games for launch day.



LITTLEBIGPLANET

Publisher: Sony •
Developer: Double Eleven/Tarsier

Sackboy's adventures continue with new ways to play and create levels, exclusive to the PS Vita.

PLAYSTATION VITA

It may look a lot like the PSP, but the PS Vita has a 5-inch multitouch screen, multiple sensors, dual analog sticks, front and rear cameras, and 3G/Wi-Fi support.

MODNATION RACERS

Publisher: Sony •
Developer: WWS San Diego

Race karts on over 300,000 tracks available online, plus all of the build options from the PS3 version.

DUAL STICKS
The PS Vita's two analog sticks should make it easier to control first-person shooters.

5" TOUCH SCREEN
Interact with games using the screen. A second touchpad is on the back.

UNCHARTED: GOLDEN ABYSS

Publisher: Sony • Developer: Sony Bend

WIPEOUT 2048

Publisher: Sony •
Developer: SCEE Liverpool

Race against up to eight players (including PS3 players) in spectacular anti-gravity racing.

RIDGE RACER

Publisher: Namco Bandai •
Developer: Namco Bandai

High-speed drifting is at the heart of this gorgeous racer, which supports up to eight players in online play.

ALSO AVAILABLE for the PS Vita on February 22:

Escape Plan • Gravity Rush • Hotshots Golf World Invitational • Little Deviants • Reality Fighters • Resistance: Burning Skies • Ruin • Shinobido 2: Revenge of Zen • Touch My Katamari

BATTLEFIELD 3™
ABOVE AND BEYOND THE CALL
10.25.11
WINNER
OF OVER
60
GAME INDUSTRY
AWARDS
MATURE 17+
M
ESRB
Blood
Intense Violence
Strong Language
PC
PS3
XBOX 360
XBOX LIVE
© 2011 Electronic Arts Inc. Battlefield 3, Frostbite and the DICE logo are trademarks of EA Digital Illusions CE AB. EA and the EA logo are trademarks of Electronic Arts Inc. Xbox, Xbox 360, Xbox LIVE and the Xbox logos are trademarks of the Microsoft group of companies and are used under license from Microsoft. "PlayStation" and the "PS" Family logo are registered trademarks and "PSN" and the PlayStation Network logo are trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners.
DICE
EA
BATTLEFIELD.COM

MASS EFFECT 3

The battle for ultimate survival, sacrifice is the only option | Written by Chris Ashton

It all comes down to this. After two games of buildup, the inevitable war with the Reapers—a seemingly unstoppable race of ancient machines that cleanses the galaxy of organic material every 50,000 years—finally begins in Mass Effect 3, humanity comes under direct attack and it's up to you, as Commander Shepard, the first human to join the elite task force known as the Spectres, to unite the galaxy's diverse races against this dire threat.

For developer BioWare, Mass Effect 3 offers the opportunity to include a feature its fanbase has long been crying out for—multiplayer. But in keeping with the game's role-playing roots, this four-player co-op mode isn't being tacked onto the single-player campaign as extraneous filler; it will serve to flesh out the storyline and enhance your chances of standing victorious at the end of the game.

A new "Galaxy at War" system replaces the resource mining sub-game from the first two games, allowing you to accumulate military resources that will help you win against the Reapers. Winning won't be so easy, either. BioWare says that Veteran difficulty from Mass Effect 1 and 2 will be on par with normal difficulty in Mass Effect 3. But at least Xbox 360 Kinect owners will be able to enjoy the benefit of barking out orders in real-time, directing the movements and actions of party members by voice as they lead Shepard into battle with the gamepad.

If you haven't explored the Mass Effect universe yet, you still have time to get started. The last chapter in the trilogy arrives March 2012. In the meantime, check out what Mass Effect 3 has in store for you in the following pages.

N7

Returning Turian
The Turian agent Garrus Vakarian is back as one of Shepard's crew.
Good Shepard?
Some question if Shepard still works for terrorist group Cerberus.

THE SERIES

MASS EFFECT

Humanity learns of a vast intergalactic network based on mass effect physics, allowing faster-than-light travel. Shepard discovers it was left behind by the Reapers, ancient machines that extinguish all organic life every 50,000 years—and they're coming back.

MASS EFFECT 2

Two years after *Mass Effect*, something is abducting human colonies. Killed but rebuilt by the possible terrorist organization Cerberus, Shepard must work with their mysterious leader, Illusive Man, to discover why. Meanwhile, the Reapers are finally making their move.

MASS EFFECT 3

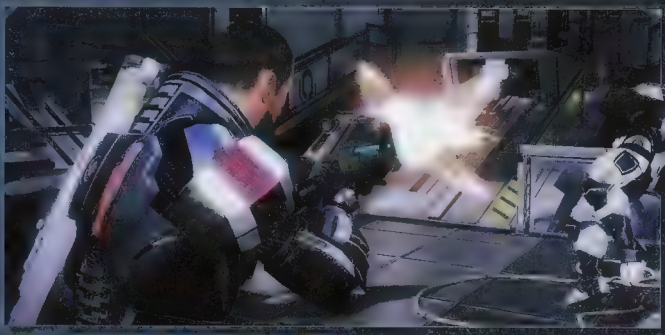
As an all-out attack begins against Earth, the Citadel Council can no longer consider the Reapers a myth. Now reinstated to active service, Shepard must lead the galaxy in a battle for survival against deadly machines that seek to subjugate and destroy all organic life.

▲ Every surviving cast member from the first two games will make appearances in *Mass Effect 3*.

▲ If you completed *ME2*, your save game will decide if characters like Legion live to fight in *ME3*.

▲ Enemies will be smarter, bigger, and better armed than they were in previous games.

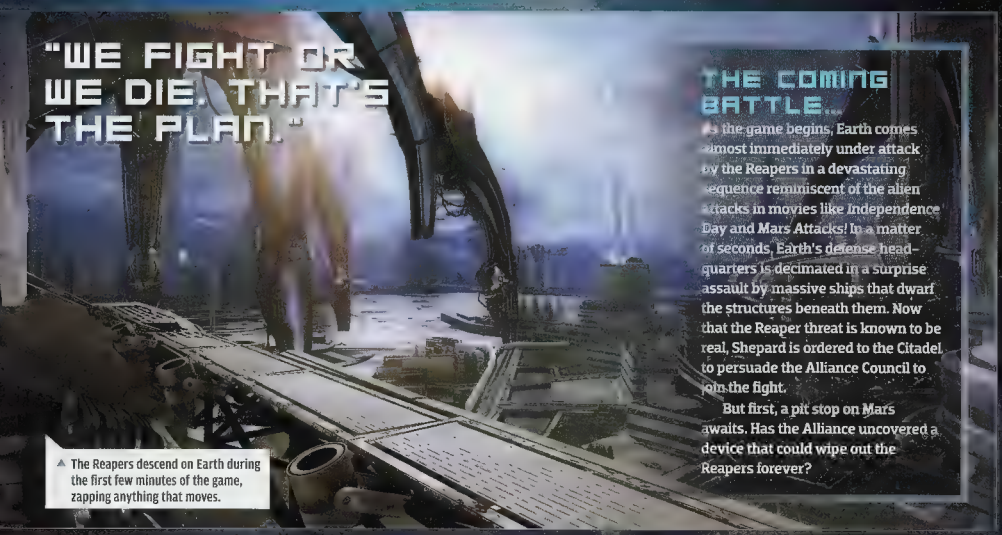
Friends or More? Asari researcher Liara T'Soni has been romantically linked to Shepard.



WHAT'S NEW IN *MASS EFFECT 3*?

In addition to multiplayer and the new Galaxy at War system, the core gameplay in *Mass Effect 3* has been beefed up considerably. A new AI system allows enemies to work together in combat, flanking you and rolling for cover in tight spots. They'll also drop smoke bombs to cloud your view of the battlefield, and can repair fallen soldiers on the field.

Likewise, Shepard is now more agile than before, and can dive, roll, maneuver turns while in cover, and take enemies down with all-new melee attacks (even while around cover!



"WE FIGHT OR WE DIE. THAT'S THE PLAN."

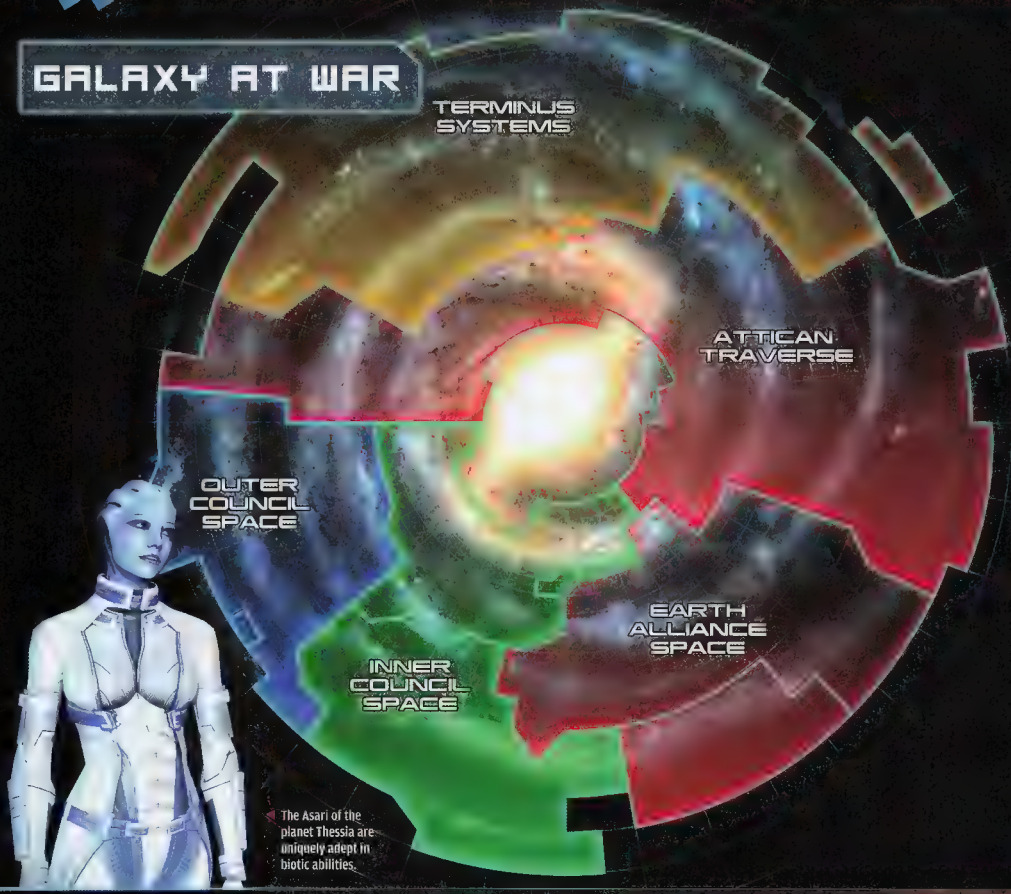
▲ The Reapers descend on Earth during the first few minutes of the game, zapping anything that moves.

THE COMING BATTLE...

As the game begins, Earth comes almost immediately under attack by the Reapers in a devastating sequence reminiscent of the alien attacks in movies like *Independence Day* and *Mars Attacks!* In a matter of seconds, Earth's defense headquarters is decimated in a surprise assault by massive ships that dwarf the structures beneath them. Now that the Reaper threat is known to be real, Shepard is ordered to the Citadel to persuade the Alliance Council to join the fight.

But first, a pit stop on Mars awaits. Has the Alliance uncovered a device that could wipe out the Reapers forever?

GALAXY AT WAR



The Asari of the planet Thessia are uniquely adept in biotic abilities.

TERMINUS SYSTEMS
The inhabitants of the Terminus Systems remain independent and refuse to acknowledge the political authority of the Council. It is a haven for pirates and the galaxy's slave trade.

OUTER COUNCIL SPACE
Home to some of the many non-human races that belong to the Citadel Council. "Misunderstandings" early on have led many races to be suspicious of humans.

INNER COUNCIL SPACE
Base for the Citadel, the nexus of the galactic community, which houses the Citadel Council, a governing body composed of multiple species from across the galaxy.

EARTH ALLIANCE SPACE
Home to Earth, the homeworld and capital of humanity. Its governments include the United North American States, the European Union, and the Chinese People's Federation.

ATTICAN TRAVERSE
The new frontier of Citadel-controlled space, the Attican Traverse is rife with resource-rich worlds...which have also been the subject of pirate raids from the nearby Terminus Systems.

WHAT IS IT?

The Galaxy at War system is a way for you to fight a galactic war and acquire resources for the final war with the Reapers. As outlined on the color-coded map to the left, you can gauge your progress in the conflict at a glance, seeing immediately where trouble areas are and where immediate intervention is needed. It will determine your preparedness in facing the Reapers during the endgame by calculating the number and quality of War Resources (military personnel, fleets, strategic bases) at your command. Social apps on Facebook, iPad, and iPhone will also play a part, though exactly how has yet to be revealed.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

Hotspots on the Galaxy at War map let you know about side missions and campaign plot points that give you an opportunity to earn War Resources. It also pinpoints multiplayer opportunities to collect resources that you wouldn't gain otherwise in the single-player game. All War Resources are calculated into your Readiness Rating: a point total that indicates how ready you are for the endgame and what type of ending you can expect to get. But don't worry if the Reapers beat you the first time around; you can always return to your previous save game and collect more resources.

STAR CAST

The voice cast of *Mass Effect 3* includes some well-known faces, especially to fans of sci-fi.

ILLUSIVE MAN

Played by Martin Sheen

The star of *Apocalypse Now* and *The West Wing* is a multiple Emmy and Golden Globe award winner and one of the world's most respected actors. Oh yeah, he's also Charlie Sheen's dad. Winning!

JOKER

Played by Seth Green

In a career that includes *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Family Guy*, the *Austin Powers* films, and *Robot Chicken*, Green has geek cred to spare. But did you know his big break was the Woody Allen film, *Radio Days*, playing a young Alvy?

EDI

Played by Tricia Helfer

No stranger to playing synthetic life-forms, Helfer's main claim to fame was portraying the sexy Cylon, Number Six in *Battlestar Galactica*. EDI, the Normandy's onboard AI, could be a distant relative.

KAL'REEGAR

Played by Adam Baldwin

With *The X-Files*, *Firefly*, and *Angel* under his belt, Baldwin is having fewer sci-fi adventures on the final season of *Chuck*. He plays government agent John Casey, who works with...

MIRANDA LAWSON

Played by Yvonne Strahovski

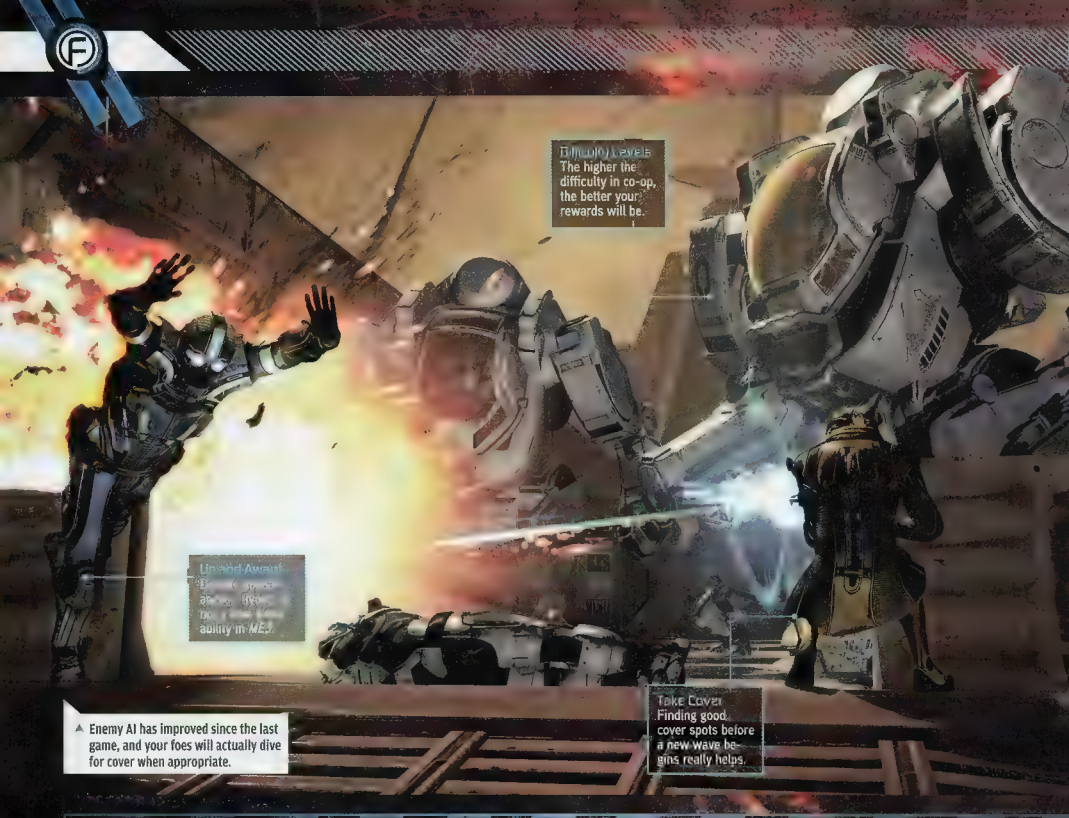
Best known as Sarah Walker on TV's *Chuck*, Strahovski had her face scanned and animated to appear in *Mass Effect 2* and *3*. Post-*Chuck*, she will co-star in the Seth Rogen comedy *My Mother's Cuckie*.

VICE ADMIRAL STEVEN HACKETT

Played by Lance Henriksen

Boasting a resume of sci-fi films and series that includes his pivotal role as Bishop in *Aliens*, Henriksen is one of the more immediately recognizable members of the cast...or would be if Hackett actually looked like him.

SOCIAL APPS PLAY A PART...


Difficulty Levels
The higher the difficulty in co-op, the better your rewards will be.
Unlock Awards
ability in ME3.
Take Cover
Finding good cover spots before a new wave begins really helps.

▲ Enemy AI has improved since the last game, and your foes will actually dive for cover when appropriate.

MULTIPLAYER

CAUSE NO ONE CAN FIGHT A WAR ALONE

CREATE YOUR OWN HOMEGROWN HERO AND FIGHT IN CO-OP

In single-player, you'll uncover conflicts that don't impact the main storyline directly, yet are still important to the overall war. You and up to three others can fight these skirmishes in online co-op. Create a new character from any of the allied races and choose a class—Soldier, Vanguard, Engineer, Adept, Sentinel, or Infiltrator—and brawl in matches against 10 waves of enemies. Credits can be earned to unlock new characters and weapons in the online shop. Max out the level of your character and you can add him or her to your list of War Resources in the single-player campaign!

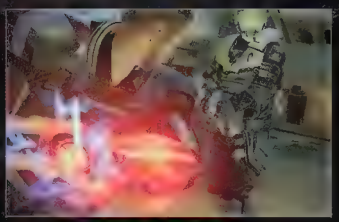
▼ Shepard is almost always joined in action by two of his crewmates.

HANDS-ON WITH ME3

From its shocking opening scenes, ME3 tells a more emotional, tender story about war and sacrifice. But, from my playtime with the opening of the single-player campaign and four-player co-op, there's also a heavy focus on combat. The first thing you'll notice about the enemies is how smart they are. They seem to instinctively take cover, laying down smoke bombs when pinned and working in unison to flank you. I was often surprised by Reaper or Cerberus agents whom I didn't initially see.

In multiplayer, surviving the match is often as important as inflicting damage. BioWare claims the multiplayer levels can be soloed, but that seems like a pipe dream. Warding off 10 waves of enemies, with sub-missions of assassinating key enemies or deactivating planted devices, was a full-time job for all four players. The toughness of your enemies ramps up considerably in later waves, too, with shield-wielding Guardians, ninja-like Phantoms, and hulking mechs making survival a real workout.

▲ Dialogue choices will depend on your actions, moral alignment, and the characters in your party.



▲ You can evolve and customize Shepard's biotic powers, such as Throw and Warp, as he levels up.

▲ Mechs tend to show up in the later waves of multiplayer missions as minibosses. They're really hard to kill solo.

GAME DETAILS

MASS EFFECT 3

INFO
Publisher: EA
Developer: BioWare
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PC

RELEASE DATE
March 6, 2012

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
1-4 player co-op online

GENRE
RPG

SUITABLE FOR
Anyone who wants to see whether humanity survives its showdown with the Reapers

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!

Assuming you've already played *Mass Effect 1* and *2*, tackle the spy RPG *Alpha Protocol*.

WANT MORE? SCAN THIS!

Scan the QR code with your smartphone to watch the official trailer for *Mass Effect 3*.

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Will wrap up one of the truly great sci-fi trilogies
- ❤ Introduces multiplayer co-op to the series
- ❤ Improved enemy AI and tactics

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Is this the last we'll see of Commander Shepard and crew?
- ✖ Mineral miners need not apply

2012 PREVIEW

With 2011 in the rearview mirror, it's time to take a look at 2012! • Words: Mitch Dyer

We just finished one of the most insanely busy, unbelievably excellent holiday seasons gaming has seen in years. Fall 2011 gave us one smashing success after another, and we barely had time to sit down and let 'em all sink in. It's looking bad for our schedule, and 2011 is quickly falling into backlog territory. Meanwhile, 2012 is already looking like a year packed full of amazing games and intoxicating variety. We're gonna have more sweet new originals, sequels, and reboots this year than we'll ever have enough time to try out. This is going to be a rad year.

MASS EFFECT 3

Publisher: EA • Developer: BioWare • Release Date: March 6, 2012

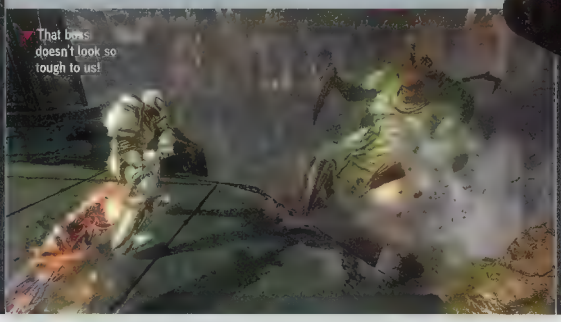
BioWare hasn't done us wrong with *Mass Effect* yet, and everything we've seen about this sequel makes us tingle. The gunplay is markedly more impressive than *Mass Effect 2*'s major improvements, and the addition of melee combos makes for some brutal takedowns. Multiplayer is the wild-card feature in *Mass Effect*, though. How popular will it be? Will co-op be enough to lure people away from the single-player campaign? Oh well. Cynical though we may be, it's hard to deny its implementation is clever. With the galaxy at war with the Reapers, we've been waiting to see how our decisions over the last five years changed the galaxy. \\

▼ Want more *ME3*? Check out our cover story on page 36.

KINGDOMS OF AMALUR: RECKONING

Publisher: EA • Developer: 38 Studios/Big Huge Games • Release Date: February 7, 2012

Reckoning is a risk for a first-time developer like 38 Studios. It invested a huge amount of money in bringing on some big guns, including a co-developer in Big Huge Games. The impressive combat system represents the strongest asset in *Amalur*—magic and hard-hitting melee attacks intertwine seamlessly. To flesh out its fantasy universe, the team (wisely) hired author R. A. Salvatore to write the story. Meanwhile, Todd McFarlane (*Spawn*) is in charge of the art. *Kingdoms of Amalur* has an impressive team working on it, and they have some grand ambitions for the single-player RPG. \\



▼ That boss doesn't look so tough to us!

LOLLIPOP CHAINSAW

Publisher: Warner Bros. • Developer: Grasshopper Manufacture • Release Date: TBA 2012

A high school senior slaughtering zombies with a chainsaw sounds like a great excuse to over-sexualize a saucy cheerleader. What more would you expect from *Shadows of the Damned* designer Suda 51? Because this is exactly what *Lollipop Chainsaw* is all about—cute girl, dead dudes, blood, guts, glam, and glitter. It's a crude and colorful action game whose style outweighs its already impressive substance. Disembowelling and dismembering undead masses with a chainsaw is a simple, satisfying pleasure, and the cheesy camp of the characters only reaffirms it: *Lollipop Chainsaw* is completely off its rocker in all the right ways. \\

Get ready to deal out some much-needed

DARKSIDERS II

Publisher: THQ • Developer: Vigil • Release Date: June 2012

If you recall the original *Darksiders*, War—protagonist and one of the Biblical four horsemen—ended up in trouble for prematurely destroying Earth. Problem was, ol' War was framed, and his brother Death is hip to the conspiracy. *Darksiders II* runs parallel to the original, and while War is off gallivanting and collecting stuff, Death is investigating his sibling's setup. As Death, we'll dig deep (with a scythe) for the truth (presumably buried in any of the hundreds of chest cavities we'll crack open). Developer Vigil has managed to add to and improve on the first *Darksiders* without changing the essentials. The satisfying combat gives Death more moves and more weapons than War, and the world is twice as large. Sure, this is all the sort of stuff we want from a sequel. But in *Darksiders*, we're anxious to explore the newness on our own. The original was a pleasant surprise with its challenging puzzles and creative combination of exploration mechanics. That's enough for us to give Vigil the benefit of the doubt to crush it with an awesome sequel...which includes sweet, sweet loot drops, by the way. \\

A darker Lara Croft story? Sign us up!

TOMB RAIDER

Publisher: Square Enix • Developer: Crystal Dynamics • Release Date: Fall 2012

The *Tomb Raider* series hasn't ever had a consistent tone. Early games saw Lara Croft fighting raptors and tigers, where recent sequels have sunk progressively deeper into darker territory. Her wise-crackin' ways are absent as far as we've seen in next year's prequel/reboot. A 21-year-old Lara finds herself shipwrecked on an island where survival is her sole goal. Crystal Dynamics is being unflinching in terms of doing terrible things to a vulnerable Lara—she'll wind up in some sticky situations that see her impaled by rebar and generally getting the life beaten out of her. It's violent, but not in a way we're used to in games. We're sure she'll grab a gun eventually, but the horrible things happening to Ms. Croft early in the story don't bode well for her immediate future as a spunky treasure hunter. \\

ASURA'S WRATH

Publisher: Capcom • Developer: Cyber Connect2 • Release Date: Feb. 21, 2012

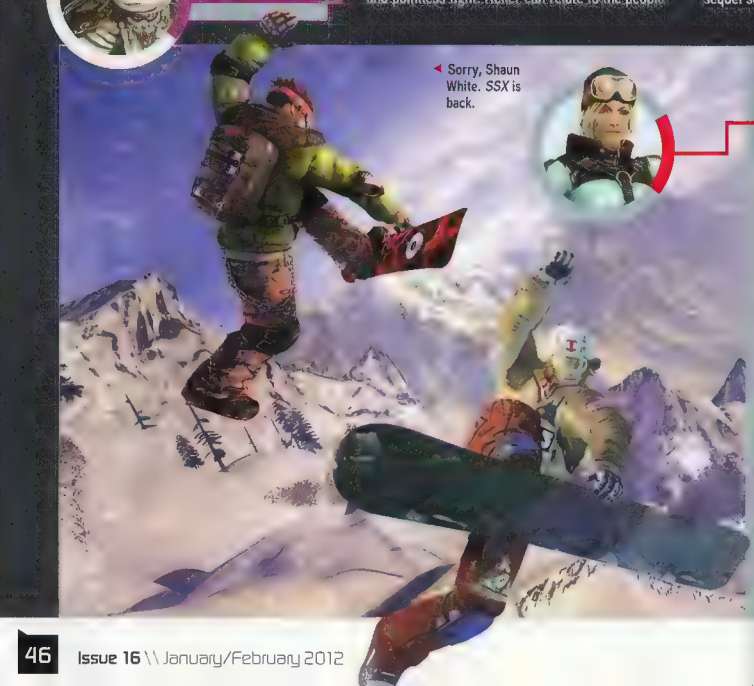
Button mashing has never been as fun as it is in *Asura's Wrath*, where rotating sticks and timing trigger pulls is essential to, say, rapidly punch the finger of a boss bigger than the Earth. The grandiose action scenes may just be, well, scenes, but the effect your frantic actions have on 'em make the over-the-top action more than something to look at. Here's the thing about *Asura's Wrath*: It's so fast-paced, and there's always so much going on, that its simple inputs don't feel like dinky button-pressing events at all. You feel a part of what's happening even though you have no direct control over what's going on. *Asura's Wrath* is exciting because you never know what's coming next. \\

Goodbye, Alex Mercer. Hello, James Heller.

PROTOTYPE 2

Publisher: Activision • Developer: Radical • Release Date: April 24, 2012

Radical and Activision know what we all thought of *Prototype* and are acutely aware of the game's flaws, and *Prototype 2* addresses them in a method that's appropriate to the game—they've absorbed the information and learned from it. *Prototype 2* ditches the unlikable antihero Alex Mercer and turns him into the villain. Now, that guy we all hated playing is our primary target, and James Heller, ticked-off family man, is our new protagonist. Heller's hunt for Mercer is far more varied than Mercer's bland and pointless fight. Heller can relate to the people around him, so there isn't the need to senselessly slaughter everyone around you. Don't sweat it: You'll do plenty of absorbing and eviscerating as you hunt down Mercer. As Heller moves from one quarantined territory to another, each more heavily infected with crazy-monster-plague than the last, mercy becomes less of a concern. Three big zones with distinct gameplay elements is far preferable to the more limited experience we had with the first *Prototype*, and it's the start of what makes the sequel so much stronger. \\



Sorry, Shaun White. *SSX* is back.

SSX

Publisher: EA • Developer: EA Canada • Release Date: February 14, 2012

After a crummy Wii version and a few years off the grid, we're relieved to see the return of *SSX*. EA's snowboarding franchise has always been ahead of the competition—even the oldest game puts most modern wannabes to shame. The next *SSX* puts more emphasis on the extreme side of extreme sports than any previous version. The mountains may be made up of real-world pieces, but how you shred 'em is anything but believable. Implausibility is why we love these games, and we live for *SSX*'s huge jumps, impossible combos, and deadly tricks. EA's recent turn toward social integration is an important aspect of *SSX* as well. Grouping up and competing with others is always available via Ridernet, a killer multiplayer feature that takes a few cues from the excellent Autolog. Sharing personal ghosts and taking part in global events gives you potentially limitless online challenges. \\

DRAGON'S DOGMA

Publisher: Capcom • Developer: Capcom • Release Date: March 27, 2012

We love our quirky Japanese RPGs.

Dragon's Dogma feels much more like a western-developed action-RPG than anything else, with some definitive Japanese influence. The clash of cultures is awesome and subtle, and it leaves a fantasy game that gives us the best of both worlds. Sure, the look isn't anything new, and the dungeon running looks fairly straightforward. Oh, and no co-op is a huge bummer, too. It's the thrill of *Dogma*'s dynamic boss fights that'll get everyone all hot and bothered. Grabbing onto a griffon's feathers as it takes to the sky isn't a necessary tactic for taking it down, but it's definitely a viable one. Stabbing a flying monster as it drops to the ground is an intense moment, and it's an even crazier scene if you managed to light the beast on fire beforehand. If Capcom can maintain equally interesting encounters throughout, we'll forget all about moral dilemmas and dialogue choices. Giving us greater options when it comes to taking on enemies is something RPGs have needed for some time. *Dragon's Dogma* definitely delivers on that front. \\

We know how you'll be spending your 2012.

DIABLO III

[redacted]

Blizzard pretty much perfected the top-down dungeon crawler with *Diablo II*, and with *Diablo III* it's trying to redefine it. The *click-click-click* combat model is as simple as ever, and it's supported by new defensive modifiers and offensive skills. Each class, some new but all familiar, has its own distinct active and passive talents. The on-the-fly adjustments to accuracy, damage, armor buffs, speed, ranged power, and such give the improved, ferocious hack-n-slashing an incredibly strong feel. *Diablo III* is largely similar to what we've always adored about *Diablo*, which is what we wanted more of these past 12 years. *Click-click-click*. \\

SPEC OPS: THE LINE

Publisher: 2K • Developer: Yager Development • Release Date: TBA 2012

Yet another game trying to do something new with moral dilemmas, *Spec Ops: The Line* puts us in hairy, human situations amidst a war in Dubai. Our reactions to bad situations invariably lead to undesirable results. *Spec Ops* wants to drive home the harsh reality of war without going crazy with the gameplay. It's a third-person, cover-based shooter whose mature, unflinchingly dark principles are the main appeal. Dynamic sandstorms that affect sight and navigation during its tense firefights are welcome additions to that party. We'll get to experience all this in co-op multiplayer, perhaps as soon as the spring via a multiplayer beta. \\

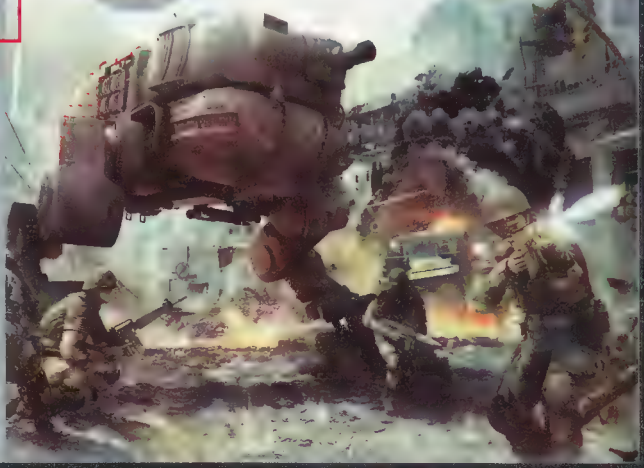
2011 wasn't the only year for military shooters.

STEEL BATTALION: HEAVY ARMOR

Publisher: Capcom • Developer: From Software • Release Date: TBA 2012

Heavy Armor comes a decade after the original *Steel Battalion*, which required a special, massive controller to play. The multipiece device had numerous joysticks and foot pedals in addition to its dozens of buttons, and demanded a hefty amount of table space. Developer From Software—which has been on a roll lately—found a brilliant way to modernize the same idea. *Steel Battalion: Heavy Armor* understands the limitations of gesture control while using it to its advantage; its combination of Kinect and controller to drive giant military robots is exactly the sort of implementation we've wanted from the motion device. *Steel Battalion* picks up on your body movements while you use your game pad, so aiming, firing, and moving will be spread across both control methods. We want to wreck walking tanks immediately. \\

▼ We'll miss that crazy controller. Actually, we won't.



SYNDICATE

Hal Miles Kilo: quite the dreamboat.

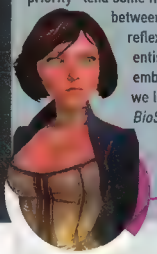
Publisher: EA • Developer: Starbreeze • Release Date: February 21, 2012

Starbreeze is revered for its first-person adventure games with good reason. Its *Escape From Butcher Bay* and *The Darkness* each gave us unique experiences that did something different with first-person storytelling and combat. It makes sense, then, that the developer's spin on *Syndicate* pulls the classic, top-down strategy series away from its origins. Yet despite the guns everyone's packing, combat in *Syndicate* is an up-close-and-personal experience. Infiltrating and attacking enemy corporations is more engaging when we're, say, tackling bad guys down stairwells, or kicking a wounded soldier in the teeth. Closing the gap is important, though our main man Miles Kilo has some fancy ranged tricks up his sleeve. Using fancy-pants future technology, he can hack turrets remotely, trick enemies into killing each other (or themselves), and manipulate the environment to add or eliminate cover. Adrenaline fuels these abilities, so you'll need to throw Kilo into the thick of it to get his blood pumping. Close calls and cool kills give him what he needs for his techno-wizardry, so *Syndicate* constantly encourages risky but rewarding approaches to assaulting corporate facilities. \\

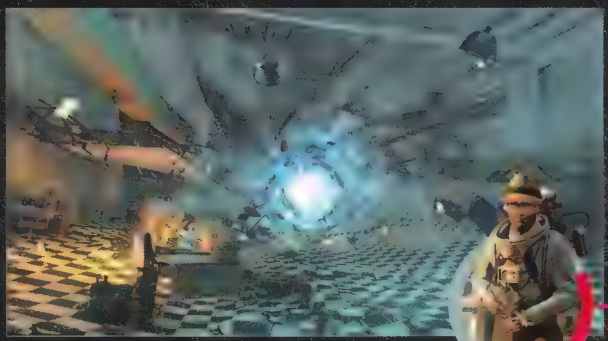
BIOSHOCK INFINITE

Publisher: 2K • Developer: Irrational • Release Date: TBA 2012

True to series tradition, *BioShock Infinite* is as much about entertainment as it is about sending a meaningful message. The premise is in politics, with an airborne American city stricken by civil war. The spookier side of the series remains despite the warmer, more welcoming vibe of *Infinite*. The brief bits of excruciating tension—hiding and protecting a woman from a frightening, flying beast is hero Booker DeWitt's priority—lend some nice pacing breaks between intense, quick-reflex firefights. It's an entirely new take that embodies everything we loved about *BioShock*. \\



Fans wil. love the latest in the *BioShock* series.



XCOM

Publisher: 2K • Developer: 2K Marin • Release Date: March 9, 2012

XCOM is a first-person reboot that steps away from its roots as a near-future, top-down strategy game. This is bound to upset some hardcore PC gamers, but it's tough to look at the alien invasion reboot in action and still condemn it. Come on. Alien investigators, the FBI, the 1960s...this sounds like a stellar sci-fi period piece. Although it's an FPS, this version of *XCOM* still sits well with most of what the original engineered. Tactics are important to kicking alien tail—you'll have a squad of guys to boss around in battle. Their goals also include capturing, researching, and using found extraterrestrial technology against our angry visitors. Also, everyone wears fedoras. \\

FAR CRY 3

Publisher: Ubisoft • Developer: Ubisoft Montreal • Release Date: TBA 2012

Even now, three years after its release, *Far Cry 2* is an open-world adventure unlike anything else. It dared to defy genre conventions in ways that made it aggravating and unapproachable, but it was an intelligent and consistently amazing shooter for players patient enough to learn and abide by its unfamiliar rules. If *Far Cry 3* retains a shred of what made its predecessor such a success, it should be at the top of your most-anticipated list. *Far Cry 3* brings us back to the green jungles and gushing waterfalls of the series's early days, where our protagonist is just a tourist in search of his lost lady. It's an ancient story premise, but the action explodes when our hero gets involved with violent psychopaths taking over his vacation spot. We're ecstatic about the flexibility of enemy encounters—stealth is as essential to success as popping fools in the face with an AK. Plus, it's ridiculously pretty and the sociopath villains have more characterization than any others in the series. \\

WANT MORE?

...not for space constraints, we could have gone on for pages. Here are nine more 2012 games we're eyeing with anticipation.

ALIENS: COLONIAL MARINES

Publisher: Sega • Developer: Gearbox • Release Date: Spring 2012

Set between the *Aliens* and *Alien 3* movies. It's up to you save LV-426's survivors.

BORDERLANDS 2

Publisher: 2K • Developer: Gearbox • Release Date: TBA 2012

Role-playing elements meet the [illegible] in this cel-shaded shoot-em-up.

BROTHERS IN ARMS: FURIOUS 4

Publisher: Ubisoft • Developer: Gearbox • Release Date: TBA 2012

The *Brothers in Arms* series takes a dark turn this time around.

OVERSTRIKE

Publisher: EA • Developer: Insomniac • Release Date: TBA 2012

Four-player co-op gameplay is at the heart of EA's upcoming shooter, *Overstrike*.

THE WALKING DEAD

Publisher: Telltale • Developer: Telltale • Release Date: TBA 2012

Fans of the graphic novel have a lot to look forward to when this title hits in late 2012.

TWISTED METAL

Publisher: SCEA • Developer: Eat Sleep Play • Release Date: February 14, 2012

This long-running franchise will change how you feel about ice cream trucks forever.

METRO: LAST LIGHT

Publisher: THQ • Developer: 4A Games • Release Date: TBA 2012

Moscow's post-apocalyptic underworld is the perfect environment for this dark sequel.

DISHONORED

Publisher: Bethesda • Developer: Arkane Studios • Release Date: TBA 2012

Steampunk fans will love this open-world romp through time.

GRAND THEFT AUTO V

Publisher: Rockstar • Developer: Rockstar • Release Date: TBA 2012 (We hope...)

GTA does the world tour, and it's [illegible]

KINECT & MOVE

{ONE YEAR LATER}

A little more than a year old, Sony and Microsoft's motion controllers are coming into their own

• Words: Timothy J. Seppala

When first announced, many scoffed at Sony and Microsoft's attempts at motion-based controls, writing them off as "me-too" technologies trying to ape what made the Wii so successful. A year after their release, however, the landscape has changed quite a bit.

Microsoft has added Kinect functionality to nearly every aspect of the Xbox 360 experience. From voice-based searches to video chat, where the house that Gates built takes this new tech next is anyone's guess.

Sony, on the other hand, has been focusing more on the games themselves than interface interaction. It's targeting a more hardcore crowd compared to Microsoft's mass-market approach, with a strong focus on shooters. The amount of accuracy afforded by Move is perfect for games that demand precision and fast response.

If you've been holding off on either, we've rounded up the best for both along with highlights of games to come.

KINECT {BEST OF THE YEAR}

DANCE CENTRAL / DANCE CENTRAL 2

Publisher: MTV Games (*Dance Central*), Microsoft Game Studios (*Dance Central 2*) • Developer: Harmonix • ESRB: T

Developer Harmonix proved once again it owns the rhythm genre with this year's follow up to its Kinect killer app, *Dance Central*. The series boasts the best controller-free navigation we've experienced yet and lets even the most rhythmically challenged feel like they don't have two left feet. What's great is you can take the skills learned here out to the club on the weekend—all that's stopping you are your inhibitions.

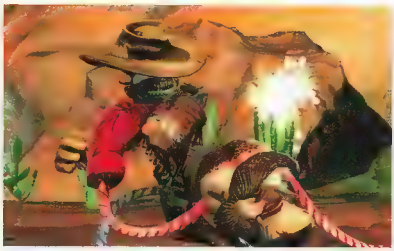
KINECT BEST OF YEAR CONT.

A YEAR AFTER THEIR RELEASE THE LANDSCAPE HAS CHANGED QUITE A BIT

THE GUNSTRINGER

Publisher: Microsoft Game Studios •
Developer: Twisted Pixel • ESRB: T

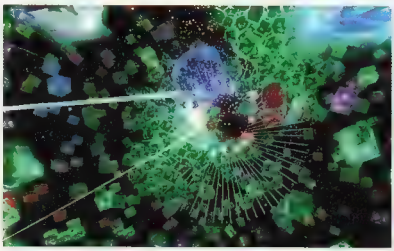
The Gunstringer offers up one of the most unique experiences we've ever had with any game. You control a marionette cowboy on a revenge mission, guiding him through environments made of household items like popsicle sticks and cardboard cutouts. Movement is on rails, guiding you from one area to the next, but the platforming and shooting are so well done we hardly noticed. Adding to the fun is developer Twisted Pixel's trademark humor.



CHILD OF EDEN

Publisher: Ubisoft •
Developer: Q Entertainment • ESRB: E10+

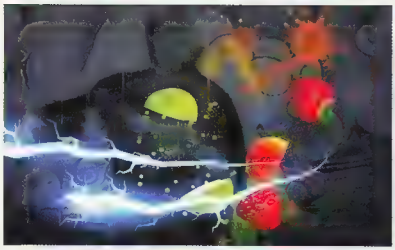
Like *Dance Central*'s menu system, *Child of Eden*'s Kinect functionality is impressive because it works really well. Playing through the trippy music-based game without a controller almost feels like you're conducting an orchestra. Bombs activate with a clap of your hands, your right hand is a single shot and your left is a rapid-fire shot. It's a little on the short side in terms of play time, but still an incredible experience. *Child of Eden* is also available on PS3.



FRUIT NINJA KINECT

Publisher: Halfbrick Games •
Developer: Halfbrick Games • ESRB: E

What started as an iOS game turned into one of the marquee titles during this year's Xbox Live Arcade Summer of Arcade promotion. And really, the citrus chop-sockey is a perfect example of how a concept as simple as flailing your arms at fruit can be so addicting. What's even better is if you buy *The Gunstringer*, you'll get *Fruit Ninja* free. It's more fun in the living room than on the train to work, too.



EA SPORTS ACTIVE 2

Publisher: Electronic Arts •
Developer: EA Canada • ESRB: E

If you're looking for a *real* workout, *EA Sports Active 2* is it. Building on the foundation of its predecessor, this sequel uses Kinect to track your entire body. Cheat that last push-up? Expect to do it again. In addition to two trainers and two workout programs—three and nine weeks—you can customize a program to fit your needs and even use any free weights you have laying around instead of the included resistance bands.

KINECT {WHAT'S NEXT}

MASS EFFECT 3

Publisher: Electronic Arts • Developer: BioWare • ESRB: RP

Mass Effect 3 is an effort to bring Kinect to gamers outside of the device's target audience. During Commander Shepard's battle to save Earth from the Reapers you'll be able to issue orders to your squad by voice. Selecting dialogue choices by saying them aloud is an additional option.

STEEL BATTALION: HEAVY ARMOR

Publisher: Capcom • Developer: From Software • ESRB: RP

What's interesting about *Heavy Armor* is that the last *Steel Battalion* required a 40-button controller that simulated the cockpit of a walking tank. This time you manipulate the virtual cockpit dials and switches with your hands via the Kinect, no controller necessary. We're intrigued by how it will all work, to say the least.

FABLE: THE JOURNEY

Publisher: Microsoft Game Studios • Developer: Lionhead Games • ESRB: RP

The next entry in the *Fable* series takes place in the universe's past. At E3 we saw a first-person horse-and-buggy sequence and an on-rails combat segment with some cool gestures for casting magic spells. Unlike other Kinect titles, the entire game can be played sitting down.

KINECT STAR WARS

Publisher: LucasArts • Developer: Terminal Reality • ESRB: RP

Lightsaber battles, Force pushes, pod racing, and more are on tap for what could be one of next year's coolest Kinect games. *Kinect Star Wars* takes place throughout the entire *Star Wars* universe timeline and will launch with an R2D2-styled white console and C-3PO gold controller bundle.

KINECT {NOW}

FORZA MOTORSPORT 4

Publisher: Microsoft Game Studios • Developer: Turn 10 • ESRB: E

Have you ever sat in a Ferrari 458 Italia on the showroom floor? No? Well, *Forza 4* can change that...virtually, at least. The new Autovista mode lets you get up close and personal with a wealth of rides letting you pop the hood, sit behind the wheel, or just take a walk around each car and admire its beauty. Kinect also allows for head-tracking (look around by moving your head) and an arcadey two-player controller-free race mode.

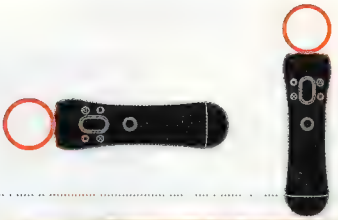
MOVE {NOW}

MEDIEVAL MOVES: DEADMUND'S QUEST

Publisher: Sony Computer Entertainment • Developer: Sony San Diego • ESRB: E 10+

Taking out skeletons and other minions in *Medieval Moves: Deadmund's Quest* is as simple as a flick of the Move wand. Instead of choosing items from an equipment screen, you use a different controller motion for each weapon, never stopping the action. *DQ* looks like it could be the first family-friendly Move title we'd want to play even when we're alone.

MOVE
{BEST OF THE YEAR}

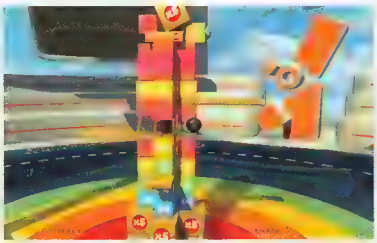


KILLZONE 3
Publisher: Sony Computer Entertainment •
Developer: Guerrilla Games • ESRB: M

Killzone 3 is our favorite Move-enabled shooter because of just how well implemented the motion controls feel. Once we had the various sensitivity parameters dialed in, picking off Helghan by pointing at our TV felt like second nature. Even the jet pack controls have intuitive integration. Thrusting the wand at the screen for a brutal melee attack felt so good, it was our attack of choice for close-quarters combat.

TUMBLE
Publisher: Sony Computer Entertainment •
Developer: Sony Computer Entertainment • ESRB: E

Tumble is the perfect game to pull out when you want to show friends just what separates Move from everything else. Largely physics-based, *Tumble* is all about manipulation and has you stacking objects, knocking 'em down, and solving puzzles. Objects have their own weight and texture and you're often fighting against each to reach the end of an exercise. A good variety of puzzles and an addictive medal system will keep you occupied for hours.



HEAVY RAIN
Publisher: Sony Computer Entertainment •
Developer: Quantic Dream • ESRB: M

Last year's *Heavy Rain* was defined by its unique control scheme. Developer Quantic Dream utilized every aspect of the PS3 controller's abilities to create an experience unlike anything else. An update last fall patched in Move controls, and they feel right at home. Opening drawers by pulling the controller toward you feels intuitive, and passing some of the Origami Killer's more heinous tests is actually easier and more responsive with Move than with the DualShock 3.

THE HOUSE OF THE DEAD: OVERKILL EXTENDED CUT
Publisher: Sega • Developer: Headstrong Games • ESRB: M

If you missed *House of the Dead: Overkill* on the Wii because, well, it was on the Wii, don't make that mistake again with the extended cut of the game for PS3. Not only does it now sport HD visuals, but it's in 3D, has more characters, more zombies, more levels, and more *everything* else. Every gamer needs a lightgun-style shooter in their library and this grindhouse zombie-'em-up is the patient zero you've been looking for.

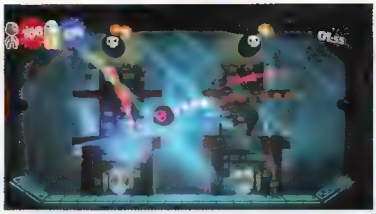
KILLZONE 3 IS OUR FAVORITE MOVE-ENABLED SHOOTER...

MOVE BEST OF YEAR CONT.

LITTLEBIGPLANET 2

Publisher: Sony Computer Entertainment • Developer: Media Molecule • ESRB: E

We've been charmed by Sackboy and his compatriots since he first appeared on PlayStation 2 in 2008, but *LBP2* cemented our relationship with them when it was released last January. Not only is the story mode much more cohesive than before, but you can use Move to control the entire experience now. This makes a huge difference when it comes to making your own levels. Dragging and dropping geometry is a snap with the Move.



TOP SPIN 4

Publisher: 2K Sports • Developer: 2K Czech • ESRB: E

If you're looking for a tennis simulation, there's really only one choice: the *Top Spin* series. Controls aren't at the 1:1 level of accuracy we'd like, and once you reach champion level play they aren't as usable because of this lack of accuracy. But the gestures work fine for more casual play and the game's deeper than the take on table tennis found on the Move pack–in *Sports Champion*. Hopefully 2k Czech will nail it with next year's release.

THE SHARPSHOOTER

Manufacturer: Sony Computer Entertainment • Price: $40

The problem with playing shooters with Move is our hands aren't the steadiest. The Sharpshooter holster from Sony helps fix this by giving you something extra to hold onto. Snapping the controllers in is a cinch and the buttons are still easily accessible. The unit feels incredibly solid and has vibration feedback and an adjustable shoulder stock, too. We just wish it came in a color other than gray.

MOVE {WHAT'S NEXT}

BIOSHOCK INFINITE

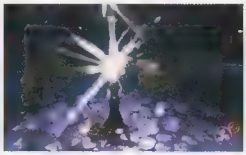
Publisher: 2K Games • Developer: Irrational Games • ESRB: RP

At Sony's E3 press conference last year, Irrational Games's Ken Levine made an appearance saying *BioShock Infinite* would make use of Move. And that's all we've heard about it. It wouldn't surprise us if *Infinite* did something similar to *Killzone 3*.

SORCERY

Publisher: Sony Computer Entertainment • Developer: The Workshop • ESRB: RP

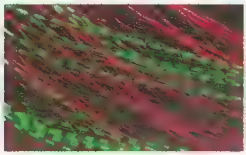
Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of Sorcery is you're holding a magic wand, using it for puzzle solving and potion crafting. What little we've seen looks incredibly promising, almost like the Harry Potter game we've always wanted but never got.



PIXELJUNK 4AM

Publisher: Sony Computer Entertainment • Developer: Q-Games • ESRB: RP

PixelJunk 4am is essentially a music-mixing tool using Move to remix and mesh tracks from electronica artist Baiyon. You can paint the environments and broadcast them online to live out your own DJ dreams.



@GAMER

PRESENTS

New Year's Resolutions 2012

- ☑ Subscribe to the @Gamer Podcast
  - Free news and commentary every two weeks!
- ☑ "Like" @Gamer Magazine on Facebook and Google+
  - Win prizes and become part of the community
- ☑ Follow @Gamer on Twitter
  - Daily gaming deals at Best Buy and news updates
- ☑ PLAY MORE GAMES!

JOIN @GAMER ONLINE:

PODCAST: Subscribe on iTunes or go to atgamerpodcast.com
FACEBOOK: www.facebook.com/ATGAMER
GOOGLE+: Search "@GAMER Magazine"
TWITTER: @GAMER

PAPERCRAFT

MASS EFFECT 3

ASSEMBLE AND COLLECT GAMER PAPERCRAFT CUTOUTS!

Want thicker, larger, and genuinely more awesome papercraft? Head over to www.atgamermagazine.com, download our papercraft, and print it out on the paper of your choice.

TOP PICKS

RATINGS BREAKDOWN:

@GAMER includes only the best games in our Top Picks section. If you don't see it here, it's probably not worth getting.

- An average game. Just worthy enough to call to your attention.
- A good game with some flaws. Fans of the genre will probably enjoy it.
- An excellent game that we strongly recommend.
- A near-perfect gaming experience.

Hey, meet the crew!

@GAMER wants you to know about the best-of-the-best games out now or coming soon, so we've put together a different kind of Geek Squad to help you out.

62 THE ELDER SCROLLS V: SKYRIM

This month, we ask the gamer panel:

There's a nasty winter storm outside. What are you playing to pass the time until it's over?

David Chapman

I'll pass the time with

tions. After all, nothing gets a person all kinds of warm and fuzzy

Or is that just me.

Lizzie Cuevas

I'll escape by losing my-

V: Skyrim. When the storm passes, I'll...uh, probably still be playing

arm there.

Andrew Hayward

Faced with an inevitable

playing *Super Mario Galaxy 2* for Wii. I've been too busy to start,

the motivation

Timothy J. Seppala

Seeing as western Mich-

Base from *Star Wars* between December and March, I'll stay busy in

God, please.

TOP PICKS

58 METAL GEAR SOLID HD COLLECTION
60 HALO: COMBAT EVOLVED ANNIVERSARY
62 THE ELDER SCROLLS V: SKYRIM
65 JURASSIC PARK: THE GAME
66 NEED FOR SPEED THE RUN
68 SUPER MARIO 3D LAND
69 WWE '12
70 DRAGON BALL Z: ULTIMATE TENKAICHI
71 KIRBY'S RETURN TO DREAM LAND
72 SERIOUS SAM 3: BFE
73 GOLDENEYE 007 RELOADED
74 LEGO HARRY POTTER: YEARS 5–7
75 TEKKEN HYBRID
76 ULTIMATE MARVEL VS. CAPCOM 3
77 KINECT DISNEYLAND

MINI-REVIEWS

78 Mario Kart 7
78 Medieval Moves: Deadmund's Quest
79 Cartoon Network: Punch Time Explosion XL
79 Carnival Island
80 EyePet & Friends
80 Kinect Sports Season Two
81 The Adventures of Tintin: The Game
81 Your Shape: Fitness Evolved 2012
82 Otomedius Excellent
82 King of Fighters XIII
83 The Black Eyed Peas Experience
83 Karaoke Revolution Glee: Volume 3

NOT PICKS

There weren't any games that didn't make the *@GAMER* cut this issue!

METAL GEAR SOLID HD COLLECTION

Compilation of the year! • Words: Ryan Scott

▼ Though I'm not a fan of *Metal Gear Solid 3*, I'm definitely in the minority.

▲ The Pain—*MGS3*'s burly bee overlord—is one of the series's *least*-bizarre bosses.

Some games have stories to tell, and Hideo Kojima's *Metal Gear Solid*—the stealth-action saga of a lone government assassin, codename "Snake"—tops many meta-minded gamers' lists. Bluepoint Games's latest HD compilation brings the three key last-gen MGS games to modern systems, and they're unquestionably worth preserving.

Metal Gear Solid 2 went down in history as "that game where the trailers tricked us, and we didn't really get to play as Snake." While fans may resent Raiden, MGS2's surprise protagonist, it's intentional: The follow-up to *Metal Gear Solid* is a careful remix and deconstruction of its forerunner, a commentary on videogame sequel-itis, and a sly subversion of gamers' expectations, desires, and power fantasies. Despite your feelings about the twisty roulette-wheel plot and abundant cut-scenes, MGS2's mechanical execution is fantastic. It's hard not to have fun skulking about—even as your eyes roll at Raiden's scrappy, I-wanna-be-the-guy attitude and frequent arguments with his nagging girlfriend/mission analyst. Note to series newbies: Play *MGS1* (itself curiously absent here) first if you want this game to make any sense.

As for *MGS3*, I'm in the extreme minority with this opinion...but I never liked it much. This series prequel drops Snake into a Cold War-era jungle and presents a trio of questionable design decisions. Flexible camouflage forces you into a menu to maintain a satisfactory stealth index; the similarly menu-intensive first-aid system's intended immersion is undone by its sheer inconvenience; and the lack of traditional enemy-tracking radar—combined with *MGS3*'s wide-open nature—reduces sneaking to trial-and-error. *MGS3* triumphs with its narrative (subtly contrasting Kojima's design sensibilities with his braying fans' wishes), but for me, the gameplay conceits are hard to swallow.

WORTH IT JUST FOR *MGS: PEACE WALKER*

But this collection is worth it just for the previously PSP-exclusive *Metal Gear Solid: Peace Walker*. This *MGS3* sequel feels like the game that its predecessor should have been, preserving *MGS3*'s wilderness-warrior sensibilities without the mechanical deficiencies. It significantly expands the MGS world with a recruit-and-manage system that sees Snake growing his small mercenary organization into a nuclear superpower (an apt metaphor for the series's own evolution), and the compartmentalized mission structure and multiplayer-enabled campaign give it a fresh, far-reaching feel. If you dismissed Peace Walker because of its handheld-only status, think again: It's the feather in this fantastic compilation's cap.

▼ *MGS2*'s VR missions will take you a long time to finish.

SNEAKING MISSION

See that camouflage menu in the screenshot below? If you plan on getting anywhere in *Metal Gear Solid 3*, you're gonna be looking at that screen a whole lot.

▲ Own the PSP version of *Peace Walker*? The PS3 version's "Transfarring" feature lets you share saved data between the two systems—minus trophy support for PSP-originating saves, unfortunately.

WAR RUNNER

Metal Gear Solid: Peace Walker's life extends far beyond the scope of a single campaign playthrough. Not only can you continue to hone and perfect your clear times and rankings in each main mission, but you can do the same across a heap of extra missions, and rope varying numbers of co-op partners in to accrue equivalent (and separate) multiplayer rankings. Toss in some basic three-on-three versus multiplayer, as well as all the base-building and merc-recruitment subsystems, and you've got a game that will keep perfectionists busy for weeks.

PS3 XBOX 360

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

METAL GEAR SOLID HD COLLECTION

INFO
Publisher: Konami
Developer: Kojima Productions/ Bluepoint Games
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360
Reviewed on: PS3

RELEASE DATE
November 8, 2011

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Single-player only (*MGS2* & *MGS3*); up to 6-player online (*MGS:PW*)

GENRE
Stealth action

SUITABLE FOR
Stealth/action fanatics, anyone who loves extremely intricate narratives

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Fantastic stealth games that still hold up
- ❤ Some of the most multilayered storytelling in any videogame
- ❤ Worth getting just for *Peace Walker HD*

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Infuriatingly trial-and-error at times
- ✖ It's missing the very essential *Metal Gear Solid 1*

ANDY SAYS:
Believe it or not, there are gamers who haven't played any of the *MGS* games. This compilation solves that problem in a snap!

OVERALL RATING:

4.75

MO' POINTS!

HALO: COMBAT EVOLVED ANNIVERSARY

A Warthog ride down memory lane

Words: Lizzie Cuevas

Combat Evolved's revamped graphics almost makes you not want to shoot the enemy. So shiny!

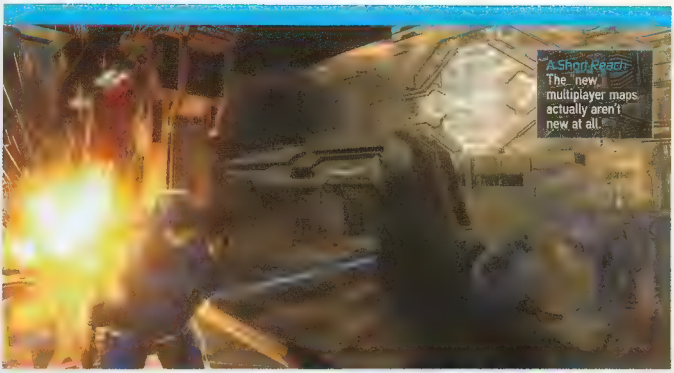
Remember that time in *Halo* when Master Chief killed a grunt, took its plasma grenade, and then stuck a camouflaged, Energy Sword-wielding Covenant Elite with it? Well, if it's all a standard-definition blur to you, you can refresh your memory with *Halo: Combat Evolved Anniversary*. But this remake of the decade-old sci-fi shooter is more than just an HD facelift—and I'm not even talking about the remastered audio, the new 3D mode, 44 new achievements, and 10 skull collectibles in the game.

While all that is cool, *Anniversary* feels more like some sort of interactive gallery than a game, at least for those already familiar with *Combat Evolved*. You end up getting a kind of "hey, look what used to be!" sense, especially when switching back and forth between HD and Classic Mode, toggling between the 2011 and 2001 graphics. It's not entirely seamless—there is a bit of a load time—but it's still pretty amazing to compare the graphics of the two games. Do it enough times and you find you don't really need to go back to Classic Mode... unless you use it to your advantage, like I did when trying to find a sniper rifle I dropped on the ground. I couldn't find it with all the new high-definition grass, so I switched to Classic Mode and boom! Found my sniper rifle. Instant lawn mower.

Where the game generates the most fun is in its multiplayer mode. Don't expect to see Blood Gulch, because it's not a rehash of the original's multiplayer mode, but instead a collection of maps from previous *Halo* games running on the Reach engine. This means you can even download it as a DLC map pack and play it if you only have *Halo: Reach*. Don't worry, you'll still be able to play it with people who are playing via *Anniversary*.

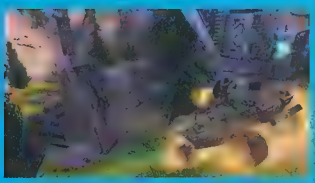
This is not to say that the campaign mode is bad at all. It is still quite fun, though a lot less fun for veterans to play through more than once. The updated graphics and sound are undoubtedly very cool, but the whole experience is almost like running into an old friend. They look better than they did in the past, you have a nice moment briefly catching up, and then you move on.

IT'S PRETTY AMAZING TO COMPARE THE GRAPHICS OF THE TWO GAMES



**MULTIPLAYER ANNIVERSARY ** Remember the Hang 'Em High and Damnation multiplayer maps from the original *Halo: Combat Evolved*? You may even remember Beaver Creek from *Halo 2*. These maps, along with three other classic *Halo* maps (Timberland from *Halo PC*, Prisoner from *Combat Evolved*, and Headlong from *Halo 2*) have been re-created with updated graphics. Plus, they run much smoother than your old maps, since they run on the Reach engine.

A TRUE CLASSIC



TERMINAL ILLNESS

Yeah, we know. We hate reading, too. (Okay, that's a lie.) Well, the terminals hidden in each *Combat Evolved* level are still there for you to find, but instead of text, all of the terminals now play a really cool video montage narrated by Mr. Guilty Spark himself. And depending on how many terminals you find throughout the campaign, you can unlock more achievements.

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

HALO: COMBAT EVOLVED ANNIVERSARY

INFO
Publisher: Microsoft
Developers: 343 Industries, Saber Interactive, Certain Affinity
Platforms: Xbox 360

RELEASE DATE
November 15, 2011

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
2-player splitscreen co-op; up to 16-player competitive online

GENRE
First-person shooter

SUITABLE FOR
Master Chief wannabes and other *Halo*-philes

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Shiny new graphics and audio make this blast from the past a current-gen gem
- ❤ Multiplayer brings back the best maps from older *Halo* games

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Campaign gets bland and repetitive, especially for those who have already played through the first game

ANDY SAYS:
I like that *Halo: CE* has been revitalized in HD...though if you've played it before, there's not much to keep you excited.

OVERALL RATING:

4

THE ELDER SCROLLS V SKYRIM

Why playing *Skyrim* is better than real life • Words: Lizzie Cuevas

If you really must know why you should drop everything in your life to play the fifth installment of Bethesda's acclaimed Elder Scrolls series—wait, hold on, I'm supposed to assassinate an enemy leader for some clan. Whew, okay. So, *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* is really one of the best games of the year because—hold that thought, I just took down a dragon with some potions I created and acquired new powers! Now that that's out of the way—ahh! I just turned into a werewolf!

But don't expect your experience to be identical to the one described above. You start off as a captured prisoner headed for execution until a dragon called Alduin attacks, allowing you to escape. As in previous Elder Scrolls games, a very important person counts on you to save the realm (in this case, stop the dragons' rising and prophesied destruction of the world). But also like the previous games, what makes the game really great is you get to make it whatever you want it to be. Even if you try to stick to the main story, it's really easy to get distracted with side quests and leveling

YOU GET TO MAKE IT WHATEVER YOU WANT IT TO BE

up your character. With well over 100 hours of gameplay full of dragon-slaying, dungeon-crawling, alchemy, lockpicking, spell-casting, building weapons, and stealing (I'm sorry, was this your coin purse?), *Skyrim* is a game you can expect to play for a really long time.

Did I mention the game is beautiful? Not only do you get to explore a colossal new world, but all the different locations are impressive visually and really take you off your couch and into a grassy meadow, or a blizzard on a mountain top, or to the edge of a waterfall. The world is also littered with people and creatures, some who want your help and some you may want help defeating (watch out for those giants—they throw a mean punch).

With a massive game like *Skyrim*, a few bugs will slip through the cracks. But they're almost sort of, well, endearing. Whether it's your horse being able to climb walls or visiting a house with no floor, the bugs are generally more amusing than irritating. Thankfully, Bethesda has fixed several of the game's major glitches with post-launch patches.

Deck This Body
Gear can be purchased, found, or even created through crafting.
Don't Lose Your Head
Dragons fly throughout Skyrim and give you powers when slain.

THAT'S NOT A LIZARD \\ For the first time in the *Elder Scrolls* series, dragons are a threat. There are many types of dragons, some harder to defeat than others, and they soar throughout the skies of *Skyrim*. When you do slay a dragon, you can collect their souls and acquire a powerful Shout ability, which allows you to "shout" at multiple enemies within a certain radius, knocking them down and temporarily stunning them.

ENEMIES

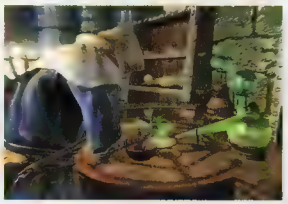
Many are out to get you, but you get the satisfaction of taking all their stuff once you kill them.

ALCHEMY

A BIT OF MAGIC

To count the number of ways enemies can be defeated in *Skyrim*, you'll need all your fingers and toes...and some of your friends' as well. In addition to wielding weapons and casting magic spells, your character can create potions by collecting ingredients throughout the game. This is especially helpful when you want to create a paralyzing potion to stop an angry troll... and you get the satisfaction of making it yourself!

▲ At least no *real* animals were harmed in the playing of this game.



▲ What do you mean I can't mix a giant's toe with a hawk's feather and vampire dust?!

PS3 XBOX360 PC

MATURE 17+ M ESRB

THE ELDER SCROLLS V: SKYRIM

INFO
Publisher: Bethesda Softworks
Developer: Bethesda Game Studios
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PC
Reviewed on: Xbox 360

RELEASE DATE
November 11, 2011

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Single-player only

GENRE
RPG

SUITABLE FOR
Fans of the *Elder Scrolls* series and those in search of a virtual getaway

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

WHAT'S GREAT
- You can play the game any way you want
- Endless hours of gameplay
- Dragons!

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- Some bugs, but nothing too major
- May not appeal to those who are warriors in real life

WIL SAYS:
I don't like fantasy or RPG games at all, but Skyrim is so good, it'll turn any non-believer like me around.

OVERALL RATING:

5

Repeat after me: "I'll never steal another wheel of cheese again."

Okay, maybe you can't do *anything* you want. Some actions will result in serious consequences. If you get caught stealing, you could end up paying a small fine. But if you get caught killing an innocent person, be prepared to kill a bunch of guards, too.

I can sell you this special balm...

The land of Skyrim is enormous, which makes traveling from one location to another on foot a buzzkill. There are a couple ways to get around in Skyrim, including obtaining a horse.

Whoa there, Buttercup. I just want to get to the other side of the map!

You'll need to equip yourself properly before exploring the world of *Skyrim*.

CREATE

THAT'S ONE UGLY...

There are ten different playable races, such as the Argonian (lizard folk), Dunmer (dark elves), and Khajiit (that man-cat you see above), each with their own set of stats and skills. Beyond that, you can customize your character's appearance, from facial features to body type. As your character levels up, you can improve its individual stats and skills.

WING IT

JURASSIC PARK: THE GAME

Right movie franchise, wrong game genre • Words: Chuck Osborn

Picking up directly from the events depicted in the first *Jurassic Park* film, this lop-sided Spielbergian adventure elaborates on the original story with a parallel plot that answers a few of the movie's lingering questions. Specifically, whatever happened to the can of shaving cream (secretly carrying stolen dinosaur embryos) lost by unscrupulous computer programmer Dennis Nedry when he became dilophosaurus chow?

More of an interactive movie than a typical adventure game, *Jurassic Park: The Game* is a wild, often tension-filled ride that accurately captures both the majesty and terror of its source material, but sacrifices gameplay to do it. Controlling the game's cast of new characters—a park veterinarian and his estranged daughter; a smuggler with roots to the island of Isla Nublar; an activist scientist; and a pair of mercenaries hired to rescue the survivors—is done by mirroring onscreen prompts with button presses during cinematic sequences. How well you successfully complete each scene will award you a gold, silver, or bronze rating. There's some puzzle-solving in the breathers between action scenes, during which characters can interact with hotspots in the environment and each other through dialogue choices, but the characters are fixed in place; you only "move" by slightly scrolling the camera around, or sometimes switching to a different character's viewpoint.

As is the norm with Telltale's adventure games, the script, voice acting, and production quality are uniformly excellent. The problem is that there's not much to figure out or explore, giving you little reason to revisit *Jurassic Park*. True, there are some awesomely dino-licious setpiece moments for you to chew on, but too much of it may feel like you're just along for the ride.

WHICH PLATFORM?

The game's graphics and performance are virtually identical across all platforms, but may be most impressive (and least expensive) on the iPad 2. The onscreen touch prompts and simple controls are ideally suited for a tablet. Another difference is that the iPad 2 version is being offered episodically, breaking the full game down into four chapters.

▲ "You best keep on flying, Mr. Helicopter. T-rex don't care. He'll bite your tail off. That nasty dino craaaaazy!"

▼ At this point a button prompt will appear on the screen. Get it wrong, get eaten, restart scene, repeat.

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

PS3 XBOX 360 PC
iPad 2

TEEN T ESRB

JURASSIC PARK: THE GAME

INFO
Publisher: Telltale Games
Developer: Telltale Games
Platforms: Xbox 360, PS3, PC, Mac, iPad 2
Reviewed on: PC, iPad 2

RELEASE DATE
November 15, 2011

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Single-player only

GENRE
Adventure

SUITABLE FOR
Jurassic Park super-fans; iPad 2 owners

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Has the "ooh," "ahh," and "arggghh!" of the movie
- ❤ Great writing, acting, and storyline

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ More of an interactive movie than a true adventure game
- ✖ Little replay value
- ✖ Timed onscreen prompts can be challenging

WIL SAYS:
Maybe it's time for a new *Jurassic Park* action game that really lets you explore the island of Isla Nublar in real time.

OVERALL RATING:

2.75

NEED FOR SPEED THE RUN

Hard-hitting action in a purely controlled world

Words: Gord Goble

Wouldn't it be cool if you could race across America in a wide-open rally where you make your own rules, perform your own repairs and upgrades, and fight like crazy just to survive? Why, yes, it would. But despite early rumors to the contrary, the visually magnificent *Need For Speed The Run* is not that game.

Instead, *The Run* may just be the most obvious example of "controlled" racing this decade. Rather than an open road, developer Black Box has essentially given us a playable movie. Alas, it's a wholly linear movie where the action is often faster and furiouser than Vin Diesel's career decline, but where there's just one way to the other coast and a series of repetitive stages to get us there.

In one of several such oft-repeated stages, you're asked to "pick up 10 positions." This wouldn't be so bad if the game flowed around you while you race. But it doesn't. Each time you do it, there are no other competitors but those 10. Indeed, every stage is a completely compartmentalized minigame.

Moreover, should you fail to beat a stage's requirements, venture too far off the pavement, or even if you're arbitrarily deemed "too slow," your attempt ends and you are reset. And in each reset, you'll find exactly the same cars in exactly the same locations. In *The Run*, you are always where Black Box wants you to be.

There's no freedom even in the single-race component, which mimics the story mode routine and is inexplicably locked at the start. Fortunately, the sophisticated, Autolog-enhanced multiplayer is far less restrictive.

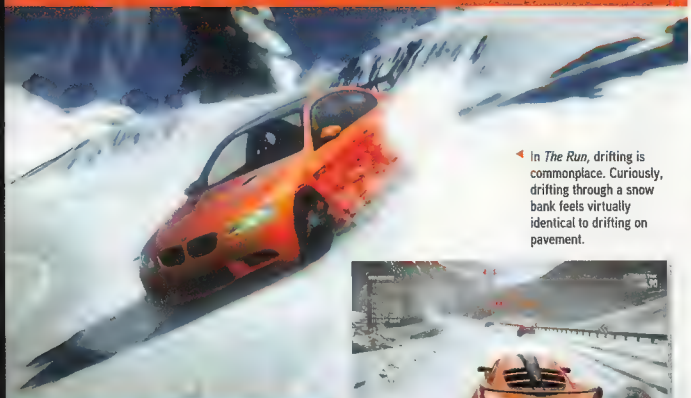
The feel behind the wheel, meanwhile, is raw speed—so much so that you're totally over-driving the conditions every moment. Technical racing junkies need not apply—this is big and bombastic from start to finish.

From a purely visual perspective, *The Run* features so much exquisitely detailed, location-specific scenery that it feels like several games in one. From billowing desert dust clouds to white-out snowstorms, the world around you is stunningly alive.

While it's an adrenaline-pumping visceral rush in multiplayer, *Need For Speed The Run* is otherwise oppressively regimented. This is no *Hot Pursuit*.

Driving hideously fast is just part of *The Run* equation. Dodging bad guys and their bullets is another.

THIS IS BIG AND BOMBASTIC FROM START TO FINISH



In *The Run*, drifting is commonplace. Curiously, drifting through a snow bank feels virtually identical to drifting on pavement.

APOCALYPSE NOW?

Every game has its "moment." *The Run*'s comes while you're snaking downhill out of the Rockies. Speed? Galactic. Conditions? Perilous. Suddenly, a cannon shot hurtles overhead...and the resulting avalanche is the most apocalyptic two minutes of racing ever.

QUICK TIME NON-EVENTS

In between the racing action sequences, The Run asks you to "play" through purely nonsensical "quick time event" cut-scenes, where smug driver Jack Rourke escapes his mysterious pursuers, puts the beatdown on police officers, and the like. You do so with cheesy button presses that are as meh as the storyline itself. Is it fun? Uh, no.

DRIVING YOU WILD

▲ The game's cross-country world is incredibly varied and astoundingly beautiful. Furthermore, viewing distances are extraordinarily deep.

▲ Sadly, *The Run* likes to control the outcome. One way is through "rubber band AI," artificially keeping racers packed together.

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

PS3 XBOX 360 PC

NEED FOR SPEED THE RUN

INFO
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Developer: Black Box Studios
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PC
Reviewed on: Xbox 360

RELEASE DATE
November 15, 2011

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Up to 8-player online

GENRE
Racing

SUITABLE FOR
"Arcade" racing enthusiasts, anyone who appreciates a little gunfire with their driving

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ The graphics are lush, tremendously detailed, and dynamic
- ❤ Brief bursts of utterly crazed driving are exciting

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Virtually everything in the single-player modes is preordained
- ✖ Way too many forced resets

WIL SAYS:
I was concerned about *The Run* when EA showed it at the last E3. Maybe if the focus had been kept on just the racing...

OFFICIAL GAMER OVERALL RATING:

3.5

SUPER MARIO 3D LAND

I'M IN 3D!

It's the best of both Marios • Words: Andrew Hayward

Super Mario 3D Land has been a beacon of hope on the horizon for Nintendo 3DS fans, whose best options for months had been remakes and rereleases of older games. And while the first original Mario title on the handheld admittedly feels like a greatest-hits compilation of all of the best elements from past entries, the end result is a fantastic new experience that sells both the system and its fancy tech.

Ending up somewhere between the side-scrolling adventures of yore and his modern 3D journeys, Mario's 3DS debut serves up bite-sized stages that take him through vibrant platforming quests across deserts, oceans, tunnels, and flying pirate ships alike. Each is packed with familiar series imagery—from item boxes to raccoon suits—as well as new elements, like a suit that lets him fling boomerangs and a propeller box that vaults him into the air.

What gives 3D Land such a unique feel is the way it swaps between fixed camera views to shape varying scenarios, and the creative level designs are often brilliant. Plus, the game is beautifully presented throughout, with the 3D effect adding a can't-miss layer of visual depth.

Due to the brief stages and slim runtime—the core stages can be toppled in about five hours—Super Mario 3D Land doesn't sink its hooks in quite as hard as Super Mario 64 or Galaxy did. But it's certainly an excellent platform adventure, and certainly the best 3DS game available to date.

ONE THING IS FOR SURE, HE AINT AFRAID OF NO KOOPAS!

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

SUPER MARIO 3D LAND

NFO

Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Nintendo
Platforms: Nintendo 3DS

RELEASE DATE
November 13, 2011

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Single-player only

GENRE
Platformer

SUITABLE FOR
All 3DS owners, *Mario* fans new and old

WHAT'S GREAT:
- Fantastic mash-up of elements from past *Mario* games
- Slick visuals are amplified by must-see 3D effect

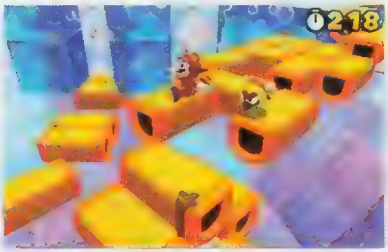
WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- Short levels and easy bosses make it feel lightweight

WIL SAYS:
You have to wonder how many more 3DS systems Nintendo would have sold if *3D Land* had been a launch title.

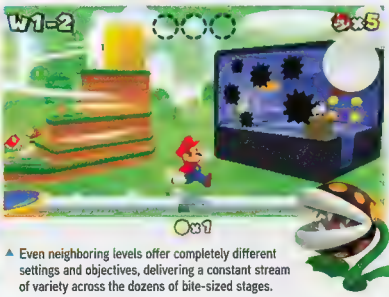
OVERALL RATING:

4.5

SUPER MORE-IO



▲ The beloved Tanooki raccoon suit returns, letting you glide through the air and whip your tail at nearby enemies.



▲ Even neighboring levels offer completely different settings and objectives, delivering a constant stream of variety across the dozens of bite-sized stages.

▼ Despite the name change, *WWE '12* can still throw a mean SmackDown.

WWE '12

It's time for another good ol' fashioned slobberknocker — Words: David Chapman

I've been a fan of sports entertainment since long before "WWE" ended with an "E" instead of an "F." Unfortunately, the WWE games have missed a few moves recently (I'm looking at you, *WWE All-Stars*). So when word came out that THQ was revamping and rebranding its hit *SmackDown vs. Raw* franchise, it was time to hit the squared circle and see if *WWE '12* was a championship contender or just a third-rate jobber.

WWE '12 comes packed with a host of new and beefed-up features. The Road to Wrestlemania story mode has been heavily expanded, taking you through three story arcs covering a year and a half of WWE events. In fact, the story is more fleshed out than most current WWE storylines. If you think you can do better, WWE Universe Mode enables you to schedule your own shows, set up rivalries, and create your own fantasy wrestling storylines.

The controls are much more approachable in *WWE '12* than they were in last year's *SmackDown vs. Raw 2011*. It's easier to pull off and chain together offensive moves. Trying to counter opponents, on the other hand, requires near-perfect split-second timing that might turn off newcomers. Also, though the game sports some of the series's best visuals to date, there's still a lot of stiffness in the characters' movements.

WWE '12 is more than just the same old *SmackDown vs. Raw* with a new name. It's a fresh start for a series that was suffering from some major match fatigue.

▲ Unfortunately, Randy Orton's title match came to a sudden stop when Mark Henry lost a contact lens.

CREATION SENSATIONS

WWE '12's Create-A-Superstar feature is, hands down, the most robust character creator I've seen to date. If you can think it, the tools are here to make it. With a little time and creativity, I was able to bulk up my WWE roster with the likes of wrestling legend Ric Flair, *Uncharted*'s Nathan Drake, and even *OGAMER*'s own Andy "The Crusher" Eddy.

▲ Old school meets new blood in dream matches starring WWE legends, such as the Legion of Doom.

PS3 XBOX 360 Wii

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

WWE '12

INFO
Publisher: THQ
Developer: Yuke's Co. Ltd.
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, Wii
Reviewed on: Xbox 360

RELEASE DATE
November 22, 2011

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Up to 4-player local;
up to 12-player online

GENRE
Wrestling

SUITABLE FOR
Peeps who know it's time to play The Game when you can't smell what The Rock is cooking

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ The customization features are ridiculously robust
- ❤ New controls are deep, but not overly complex

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Countering opponents requires near-perfect timing
- ✖ Despite improvements, character movements still feel stiff

ANDY SAYS:
I'm not a fan myself, but it's great to see THQ continuing to make upgrades to new entries in the *WWE* series. *WWE '12* is easily playable—even for n00bs.

OVERALL RATING:

4

PS3 XBOX 360

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

DRAGON BALL Z: ULTIMATE TENKAICHI

INFO
Publisher: Namco Bandai
Developer: Spike Co. Ltd.
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360
Reviewed on: Xbox 360

RELEASE DATE
October 25, 2011

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
2-player local or online

GENRE
Fighting

SUITABLE FOR
Hardcore *DBZ*ers eager to polish up their Kamehameha technique

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Lots of over-the-top action
- ❤ Interesting "What if?"-styled Hero Mode

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Too much button mashing with very little technique
- ✖ Long, drawn-out combos wear out their welcome quickly

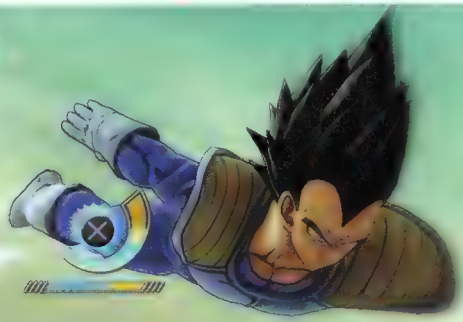
WIL SAYS:
It looks like it'll take the power of all seven *Dragon Balls* to grant *DBZ* fans a fresh new take on the *Tenkaichi* series.

OVERALL RATING:

2.75

OPM GAMER

▼ Never let a pesky thing like gravity keep you from a good fight.

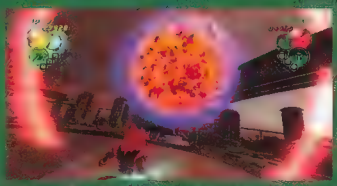


DRAGON BALL Z ULTIMATE TENKAICHI

Namco Bandai is delivering a healthy new dose of fan service to Dragon Ball Z aficionados. This time around, classic characters—such as Goku, Krillin, and Vegeta—are being joined by newcomers with such names as "Sparky" and "Bob."

Don't worry if you've never heard of these fighters before. They're just a couple of the roster additions I developed with the series's first character-creation system. It's not as robust as other create-a-character modes, but this "Hero Mode" still lets fans live out original DBZ adventures.

For good or ill, nothing has really changed in Ultimate Tenkaichi's gameplay. A couple of hits lead to ridiculously long combos, and before you know it, the match is done. It's more about crazed button mashing than any real strategy. As a fighting game, it's a fairly shallow experience. But for *DBZ* fans, it's still the closest thing they'll get to playing the anime.



▲ Maybe it's just me, but the [illegible] today. Don't you think?

▲ To be in the kitchen making [illegible] this combo is all finished.

DIY DBZ

The addition of a character creator is fine, but you start off with very limited options. New outfits, hairstyles, skills, etc. have to be earned in fights or found littered around the world.

KIRBY'S RETURN TO DREAM LAND

Looking back, stepping back • Words: Andrew Hayward

We've seen Kirby in surprising forms of late—as a piece of fabric in *Kirby's Epic Yarn* and a stack of mini-mallows in *Kirby Mass Attack*—but *Return to Dream Land* marks the first console showing of his traditional skillset in more than a decade. As such, the little pink puff can swallow foes whole and absorb their abilities, whether it's the power to shoot flames or turn into a heavy stone, and he uses those skills in a side-scrolling quest that spans eight colorful worlds full of platform challenges.

But the lovable hero isn't alone on this journey. Taking a cue from *New Super Mario Bros. Wii*, *Return to Dream Land* lets up to four players tackle any mission cooperatively, with additional players taking the role of an alternate Kirby or one of three other series mainstays: King Dedede, Meta Knight, or Waddle Dee. While they lack Kirby's ability to suck up and ingest foes, each has its own attacks and abilities to get through the generally simple stages.

Kirby's quest is cute and at times amusing—like when you're wielding one of the super abilities—but while it works as a nostalgic flashback, *Return to Dream Land* lacks punch as both a solo and multiplayer game. Previous Wii adventure *Epic Yarn* similarly lacked challenge, but made up for it with an abundance of charm and creativity. Here, the familiar elements are used again and again but yield little excitement, and it was hard at times to stay captivated despite the changing scenery and new abilities. Sadly, the four-player option doesn't add much in the way of thrills, and may not be worth the hassle for many.

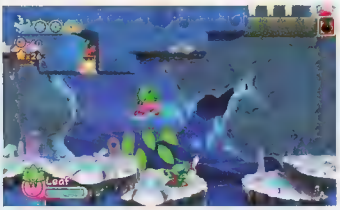
Return to Dream Land has its moments, plus it's always nice to see a fresh stab at a truly classic formula. But this sleepy four-player affair is a bit too listless to hang with the better recent revivals—such as *Rayman Origins* and *Donkey Kong Country Returns*—especially when Kirby's last Wii quest spun such a memorable, series-defining experience.

I HAVE THE POWER!

At certain points in the quest, Kirby can copy select enemies' super abilities, which let him wield a screen-filling sword or summon a fiery dragon to fly across the screen, among other perks. While these powers tip the balance squarely in your direction, essentially giving you carte blanche to tear through the stage while they last, they're downright hilarious to watch and use.

FOUR PLAYERS CAN TEAM UP

▲ It looks and plays like classic *Kirby*, but now four players can team up.



▲ Each copied ability yields a new power—such as throwing leaf projectiles.

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

KIRBY'S RETURN TO DREAM LAND

INFO
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: HAL Laboratory
Platforms: Wii

RELEASE DATE
October 24, 2011

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Up to 4-player co-op local

GENRE
Platform

SUITABLE FOR
Kirby diehards, families who play together

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Cute and colorful throwback *Kirby* adventure
- ❤ Easy drop-in/drop-out support for four players

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Levels and familiar mechanics lack excitement
- ✖ More players doesn't necessarily mean more fun

ANDY SAYS:
In spite of its weaknesses, it's fun to have a return to a "classic *Kirby*," and have the chance to team up in co-op.

OVERALL RATING:

SERIOUS SAM 3: BFE

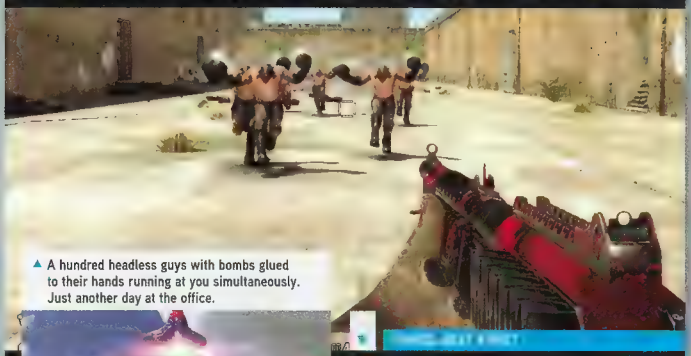
Running for cover? Get serious... • Words: Dennis Scimeca

Once upon a time, you didn't duck in first-person shooters. You stood straight up and ran headfirst into the enemy. Your health didn't regenerate when you ran behind cover. You had to pick up first-aid boxes and medkits to get your health up to 100% and kept it there by picking up armor shards and helmets and flak jackets to absorb damage. Welcome to the past. Welcome to *Serious Sam 3: BFE*.

There's something very refreshing about a first-person shooter that puts the shooting first and foremost. Sam doesn't crawl from room to room, clearing them of enemies until he triggers a cutscene. Sam stares down a hundred screaming maniacs running at him with bombs glued to their hands, in the middle of a huge courtyard with nowhere to hide. Sam faces down a horde of one-eyed gorilla monsters with nothing but a sledgehammer to smash them into pulp.

Serious Sam 3 is what *Duke Nukem Forever* should have been—an old-school shooter romp with a meatheaded hero who drops Schwarzenegger-esque quips after dealing with a gaggle of bad guys in the most violent ways possible. This is a game that will have you yelling out in fear when you see more enemies than you can count rushing at you...and shouting in victory when you stand triumphantly over the mounds of their bodies.

Add in a gaggle of co-op and competitive multiplayer modes, and devoted shooter fans can't go wrong with *Serious Sam 3*.



▲ A hundred headless guys with bombs glued to their hands running at you simultaneously. Just another day at the office.

▲ I didn't have to fight this alien warship with a sledgehammer...but wouldn't you if you could?

Serious Sam 3: BFE is the third game in this franchise, but you don't need to have played any of the previous games to get the most out of this one. "BFE" stands for "Before First Encounter," which is a reference to Serious Sam: The First Encounter, the series' premiere game published in 2001. *Serious Sam 3* is actually a prequel that does a fantastic job of introducing newcomers to what this series is all about.

▲ *Serious Sam 3* keeps power-ups simple—red for health, green for guns, blue for armor.

▲ You will quickly lose count of how many enemies get thrown at you at once.

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

SERIOUS SAM 3: BFE

NPC
Publisher: Devolver Digital
Developer: Croteam
Platforms: PC

RELEASE DATE
November 22, 2011

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Up to 4-player co-op and competitive local; up to 16-player co-op and competitive online

GENRE
First person shooter

SUITABLE FOR
Old-school FPSers; modern FPSers who want something different

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Straightforward mechanics that test nerve and reflexes like a shooter ought to
- ❤ Doesn't take itself as seriously as most current shooters
- ❤ A well-done music score

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ The no-frills presentation may turn off gamers who want more spectacle

WIL SAYS:
The *Serious Sam* series has a reputation for throwing *a lot* at you. If you're looking for more of that, *SS3* won't let you down.

OVERALL RATING:

4.25

▼ *GoldenEye Reloaded* is more graphically advanced than last year's Wii version...but just barely.

GOLDENEYE 007: RELOADED

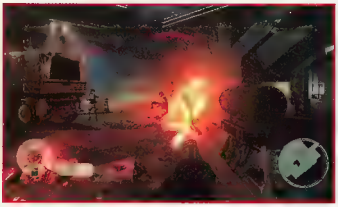
Nostalgia is not enough...but it helps • Words: Chuck Osborn

How much you enjoy *GoldenEye 007: Reloaded* will largely depend on your fondness for 1997's *GoldenEye 007* for the Nintendo 64. A remake of a remake, *Reloaded* is an HD conversion of last year's *GoldenEye* game for the Wii that "reimagined" the levels and gameplay of the classic original, and replaced retired 007 Pierce Brosnan with the current James Bond, Daniel Craig.

Those too young to experience the dawn of console shooters will probably wonder what all the fuss was about. While the original pushed the N64's hardware right to its limit, much of *Reloaded* seems like a half-step remake, caught somewhere between an HD version of the original and a cutting-edge shooter. The level design and gameplay feel dated and, though built with an all-new graphics engine, visuals on the PS3 and Xbox 360 are on par with the flat, low-textured scenes of the Wii version. Even with the voice acting of Craig and Dame Judi Dench, and an updated script by the writer of the original film, this "reimagining" of the single-player campaign seems five years too late to justify its $60 price tag.

Multiplayer may justify your purchase. New and classic modes for online play (13 modes) and splitscreen (six modes), an XP advancement system, server modifiers, and a gamut of playable characters, including vintage Bond villains like Oddjob and Goldfinger (each with unique abilities and weapons) could entice you to overlook the game's shortcomings. My quibble with multiplayer is that there are no bots to practice with; for AI opponents you'll have to tackle one of the MI6 Ops mode single-player scenarios that spotlight elimination, stealth, defense, and assault. Unless you're a *GoldenEye* superfan, your license to kill can wait for a price drop.

THE LEVEL DESIGN AND GAMEPLAY FEEL DATED



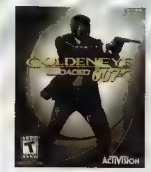
▲ Old-school gameplay: Taking cover in *Reloaded* means hitting the "crouch" button while behind obstacles.

007 CLASSIC

One concession to modern shooters is Bond's regenerating health; stay still for a few moments without being hit and the blood splatters onscreen will magically dissolve. *GoldenEye* purists, however, can select to play the campaign in 007 Classic mode, which trades regenerating health for the original's bulletproof vest pickups.

PS3 XBOX 360

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS



GOLDENEYE 007: RELOADED

INFO
Publisher: Activision
Developer: Eurocom
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360
Reviewed on: Xbox 360

RELEASE DATE
November 1, 2011

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Up to 16-player online; up to 4-player splitscreen

GENRE
First-person shooter

SUITABLE FOR
GoldenEye N64 players who've been dying for a remake

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Resurrects *GoldenEye* for a new generation
- ❤ Full-featured multiplayer with tons of characters, modes, and unlocks

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Still a generation behind in terms of visuals
- ✖ An HD port of a Wii game

MIL SAYS:
I loved the original, so it was both fun to play a "reimagining," but also disappointing that it didn't look better.

OVERALL RATING:

3

PS3 XBOX 360 Wii PC DS 3DS

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

LEGO HARRY POTTER: YEARS 5-7

INFO
Publisher: Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment
Developer: TT Games
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, Wii, PC, DS, 3DS
Reviewed on: Xbox 360, Wii, 3DS

RELEASE DATE
November 11, 2011

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
2-player co-op splitscreen

GENRE
Action-adventure

SUITABLE FOR
Wizards of all ages

WHAT'S GREAT:
- Wraps up the final four Potter films with wit and charm
- Intensely fun gameplay that encourages exploration
- Two-player co-op

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- Missing the LEGO Builder mode from its predecessor

WIL SAYS:
The LEGO games aren't just for kids. These games, whether *Star Wars* or *Harry Potter*, are tons of fun.

OVERALL RATING:

4.25

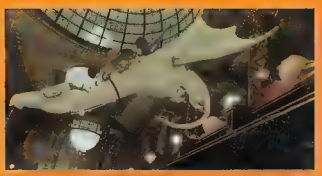
Destroying evil just got cuter

Words: Chuck Osborn

Because so few games can be enjoyed equally by both kids and adults, the launch of a new LEGO game is itself a reason to celebrate. *LEGO Harry Potter: Years 5–7*, which rounds out the last four flicks from the *Harry Potter* film franchise, is more of the same breakable good fun seen in Years 1–4. If you played that game, then you know what to expect: stylized plastic versions of Harry, Ron, Hermione, and the rest of the wizarding world loosely reenact the events from the movies, leading up to the final confrontation between "the boy who lived" and the Dark Lord. It's more of the same...and that's totally fine with me.

Given that so many of the locations from the first game are reused here (like Hogwarts and Diagon Alley), it could've been tempting for TT Games to reuse the same gags as well. But once again the developer surpasses expectations, making Years 5–7 just as charming and hilarious as its predecessor in the way it encourages experimentation and exploration. This is a game in which it's not only advised to stop and smell the flowers, but you'll want to break them as well—you can spend the LEGO studs collected on buying characters, spells, weird abilities, and more. And since a second player can drop in and out at will, it's the ideal game for a parent and child to play together.

While it's not necessary to know what's going on to play, watching the films first is definitely recommended. As the later films get more complex and serious, the game doesn't so much retell the story as try to keep up with it. The only minor disappointment is that the LEGO Builder mode from Years 1–4 is MIA—undoubtedly another victim of Lord Voldemort.



WHICH PLATFORM?

For gorgeous visuals, get the PS3, Xbox 360, or PC versions. The Wii version is identical in content, but noticeably pixelated. The 3DS and DS versions are very similar to their big brothers, but not identical (having some different puzzles and gameplay), so true LEGO lovers can double up on the console and portable versions and be doubly entertained.

TEKKEN HYBRID

The whole doesn't always equal the sum of its parts • Words: Evan Narcisse

The contents of *Tekken Hybrid* might be the very definition of a mixed bag. On one PS3-exclusive Blu-ray, you're getting a HD rerelease of a PS2 launch game, a 3D movie focusing on the mythos of the King of the Iron Fist, and a teaser for the next entry of Namco's long-running martial arts series.

As a whole, *Tekken Hybrid* both succeeds and fails in frustrating fashion. *Tekken Blood Vengeance* delivers a passable cinematic experience with roots in the franchise. The plot is in line with the high-stakes corporate espionage, anime-influenced mysticism, and intra-family feuding that serve as catalyst for all of Tekken's brawling. As expected, the fighting stands out from the rest of the fare and the production is slick. Nevertheless, it's a movie and there's no replayability; you watch it once and—extra features aside—you're done. You won't come away with deeper understandings of Jin, Kazuya, or any of the other characters. It's like an incredible, extra-lengthy cut-scene that you don't have to fight your way to view.

Speaking of fighting, the *Tekken Tag Tournament* remake and the preview of its sequel present a weird bit of cognitive dissonance for longtime fans. On one hand, *TTT*'s core engine and fighting mechanics still hold up, and it looks like they're going to evolve in some entertaining ways in *TTT2*. On the other hand, the Tag 2 prologue only includes four playable characters—android assassin Alisa, cutesy combatant Xiaoyu, Devil Jin, and Devil Kazuya—and you'll quickly tire of pitting them against each other over and over.

Hybrid's success is in reminding you of how much bizarre, fast-paced fun the franchise offers. The series moves to a rhythm all of its own, and its brand of side-stepping fisticuffs is sorely missed in current fighting games. Yet despite the $40 budget price, it still feels like you're paying too much for a glossier version of a game you likely played before, a peek at one you're not sure you want, and a cheesy, guilty-pleasure movie. *Tekken Hybrid* pretty much amounts to a dazzling flurry of punches, but it's not a KO by any means.

If you're going to include an appetizer in a combo release such as *Hybrid*, you'll have to do better than a measly quartet. *Tekken*'s roster of warriors is deep enough that they could've spared a few more for the Prologue portion. Another annoyance is the odd inconsistency of the visual upgrade the original Tag Tournament gets. The characters all look as they did back in the day—with some smoothing to sweeten the deal—but some of the environments and background characters still bear some of the rough edges of age.

▲ Robo-vixen Alisa and schoolgirl smackdown specialist Xiaoyu play big roles in *Blood Vengeance*, with guest appearances from other *Tekken* characters...including Panda. That mammal knows how to party!

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

PS3

TEEN T

CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

TEKKEN HYBRID

INFO
Publisher: Namco Bandai
Developer: Namco Bandai
Platforms: PS3

RELEASE DATE
November 22, 2011

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Single-player only

GENRE
Fighting

SUITABLE FOR
Folks who've been to every EVO fighting tournament, fans of Heihachi's weaponized male-pattern baldness, schoolgirls who compete in martial-arts duels after school

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Reacquainting with one of the PS2's great launch games
- ❤ The *Tekken* franchise's trademark speed remains

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Why so stingy with the *Tekken Tag Tournament 2* preview, Namco?
- ✖ No online play? Even for *TTT2*?

ANDY SAYS:
It's a solid collection for a *Tekken* fanatic, but not enabling online action seems like an egregious omission.

OVERALL RATING:

2.5

PS3 XBOX 360

TEEN T

ULTIMATE MARVEL VS. CAPCOM 3

INFO
Publisher: Capcom
Developer: Capcom
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360
Reviewed on: PS3

RELEASE DATE
November 15, 2011

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Head-to-head local or online

GENRE
Fighting

SUITABLE FOR
Fighting fanatics, comic connoisseurs, and any other alliterative aficionados

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

WHAT'S GREAT:
- Twelve new characters from every corner of the Marvel and Capcom universes
- Rebalanced gameplay so things don't get unfair
- A wonderful, lag-free online mode

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- Getting destroyed online by those way better than you

WIL SAYS:
Capcom continues to innovate and team with unique partners to create fresh fighting games. And Phoenix Wright kills it!

OVERALL RATING:

5

GAMER

ULTIMATE MARVEL VS. CAPCOM 3

Heroes, villains, and everyone in between • Words: Taylor Cocke

If there's one thing legendary game developer Capcom knows how to do well, it's fan service. When it released *Marvel vs. Capcom 3* last February, even the most hardcore players were pleased with its wonderfully detailed and lovingly crafted presentation. Everything—from the fantastic character designs to the pre-match and mid-fight chatter—was obviously created by folks who had a deep admiration for the two long-running franchises.

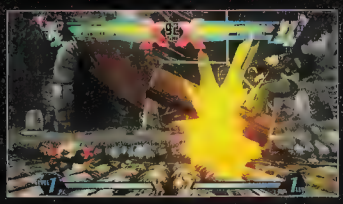
When it was time to update the hyperchaotic team-based fighter, Capcom made sure that none of that respect was lost. *Ultimate Marvel vs. Capcom 3* adds 12 new characters to the already humongous roster, making for 48 total fighters. The update focuses on some of the lesser-known characters in Marvel's and Capcom's respective rosters, including leading men such as Frank West, vile enemies like Nemesis T-Type, Avenger team member Hawkeye, and cult favorite Phoenix Wright. All make their debut appearances in fighting games.

This is more than just an updated cast, however. The entire game needed to be rebalanced to accommodate the shift in play styles that will come with the huge shuffling of teams. Fortunately, *UMvC3* comes with a fully featured Mission Mode, which serves to train new and old players in the techniques and powerful combos. Once you've mastered the 10 missions for each character (and maybe spent some time in the Training Mode honing your skills), you'll be ready to take the fight online to the pitch-perfect online mode. No lag here, folks. Every attack will land exactly when you want it to.

While two versions of a game within a year might turn some players off, there's no disputing that *Ultimate Marvel vs. Capcom 3* is the definitive version of the insane fighter. New characters, fresh stages, and a rebalanced fighting system more than make it worth picking up—for newbies and veteran combatants alike.

A BUNDLE FOR ALL

▲ Frank West brings some of *Dead Rising 2*'s more famous (and ridiculous) weaponry to the fight.



▲ Rocket Raccoon may look small, but don't underestimate his trap-based special attacks. You may get squished.

TEAM UP

The *Marvel vs. Capcom* series has always been about forming the best team for the job. Expert players will be able to utilize Team Assists to tag their characters in and out, continuing lengthy combos and pounding their opponents into the ground.

▲ I don't remember using high-powered water cannons in the *real* Jungle Cruise ride...not that I'm complaining.

KINECT DISNEYLAND ADVENTURES

If you can't bring the kids to the theme park, bring the theme park to the kids

Words: David Chapman

People call Disneyland "The Happiest Place on Earth." Well, now that happiness is never further away than your living room, thanks to Kinect Disneyland Adventures for the Kinect. I'll admit that I'm a full-grown adult, and I was instantly transformed into a little kid again.

My inner child was all kinds of warm and fuzzy while walking the grounds of this amazingly detailed re-creation of the park and interacting with the various Disney characters. But this isn't just a virtual tour of Disneyland. Many attractions take the form of cool minigames, such as flying through London with Tinkerbell in Peter Pan's Flight, bobsledding with Goofy down the slopes of the Matterhorn while fighting off Yeti, or defending yourself from the notorious Pirates of the Caribbean (sorry, there's no Johnny Depp to be found in this version). Between the minigames, quests, collectibles, and secrets scattered around, there's almost always a reason to revisit the theme park.

Disneyland Adventures suffers from some occasional wonky controls when the Kinect misreads your body. One particularly painful example to watch had my avatar reaching for a camera, when suddenly his arm snapped in half at the elbow and flopped around at the joint. All I had to do was move my (real) arm to my side for a second to recalibrate, and everything was fine.

It may be a "small world after all," but this is a very big game. Whether you've got kids or, like me, you're just a big kid at heart, *Disneyland Adventures* is a must-have experience for anyone who owns a Kinect.

MICKEY'S SECRET AGENDA

XBOX 360

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

KINECT DISNEYLAND ADVENTURES

INFO
Publisher: Microsoft
Developer: Frontier Developments, Ltd.
Platforms: Xbox 360 Kinect

RELEASE DATE
November 15, 2011

MULTIPLAYER ONLINE
2-player local

GENRE
Party

SUITABLE FOR
Families wanting to check out Disneyland without leaving the house

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Fun to play with your favorite classic Disney characters
- ❤ Much of Disneyland's fun without the pesky vacation crowds

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Controls can get a bit wonky from time to time

WIL SAYS:
It's an interesting concept—to make a game that revolves around a theme park—but one that's fun for players of all ages.

OVERALL RATING:

4.5

Mini Reviews:

Of course, size doesn't matter. These games are more than worth your attention.

Don't be shy on the track, guy.

Metal Mario leads the pack of newcomers.

MARIO KART 7

EVERYONE E CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Publisher: Nintendo • Developers: Nintendo, Retro Studios • Platforms: Nintendo 3DS • Words: Andrew Hayward

Mario Kart 7 delivers some seemingly big changes to the classic arcade racing experience, including hang gliding and underwater driving sequences, along with a number of vehicle-customization options. But the debut of the *Mario Kart* franchise on the 3DS otherwise follows a very similar template as its predecessors, and a few seconds per lap spent in the sky or below the sea don't dramatically change the feel of this weapon-centric racing affair.

Still, the familiar formula shines in this sizeable handheld entry, which delivers 16 stellar new courses and an equal number of updated classic tracks, along with excellent local wireless and online options. It's disappointing to see the same plain single-player structure and versus modes after all these years, but the game delivers a lot of racing fun and looks quite slick with 3D enabled. *Mario Kart 7* largely plays it safe—but it's also a safe bet for software-starved 3DS owners.

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Up to 8-player via local wireless or online
GENRE Racing
RELEASE DATE
December 4, 2011
SUITABLE FOR
Nintendo lovers, multiplayer buffs

OVERALL RATING:

4

MEDIEVAL MOVES: DEADMUND'S QUEST

EVERYONE 10+ E CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Publisher: Sony Computer Entertainment America • Developers: San Diego Studio, Zindagi Games • Platforms: PS3 • Words: Hollander Cooper

Medieval Moves: Deadmund's Quest isn't the Move-powered adventure game I've been waiting for. While it handles its combat exceptionally well and takes full advantage of the underutilized motion controller, the gameplay is encumbered by a design that keeps the action "on rails." This shallow approach means I'm never able to actually control my hero's movements. Instead, I'm just allowed to swing my sword, shoot arrows, and throw ninja stars whenever the hero stops to fight. Luckily, the lack of full control doesn't stop *Deadmund's Quest* from being occasionally fun. Bashing enemies with true one-to-one swordplay is surprisingly rewarding, even if the repetitive combat can become tiring.

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Single-player only
GENRE Action-adventure
RELEASE
November 15, 2011
SUITABLE FOR
Adventure seekers not afraid of a workout

OVERALL RATING:

3.25

The bigger they were, the more tired I got fighting them.

Seriously—everything in this game looks *just* like *Smash Bros.*

▼ Cartoon Network's rocking quite the lineup these days.

CARTOON NETWORK: PUNCH TIME EXPLOSION XL

EVERYONE 10+ — CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Publisher: Crave Entertainment • Developer: Papaya • Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, Wii • Words: Ryan Scott

In games, imitation is often the sincerest form of mediocrity. Case in point: *Cartoon Network: Punch Time Explosion XL*, a *Super Smash Bros. Brawl* doppelganger that swaps Nintendo's roster for a CN one.

Everything about this game is lifted straight from the four-player Nintendo mash-up, from a percentage-based knockout meter, to "signature moves" that stand in for Final Smashes, to a literally identical control scheme. A single-player story mode provides context for the crossover hijinks (and loads of unlockable characters), while a four-player battle mode (with a baffling lack of online play) apes the chaos of a typical *Smash* match. It's a halfhearted, so-average-it's-okay fighter that might appeal to CN fans who really want to play as Buttercup or Johnny Bravo.

Up to 4-player local

Fighting

November 18, 2011

SUITABLE FOR

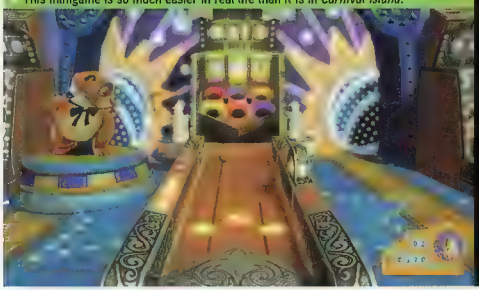
Cartoon Network sycophants

OVERALL RATING:

2.5

▼ Essentially, anything that you can waggle at, you'll be waggling at.

This minigame is so much easier in real life than it is in *Carnival Island*.



CARNIVAL ISLAND

EVERYONE — CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Publisher: Sony Computer Entertainment America • Developer: Magic Pixel • Platforms: PS3 • Words: Hollander Cooper

"Lookie, lookie...try your hand at our games of skill. How about you, mista?" Carnivals are filled with simple games that involve swinging objects, throwing items, and interacting in basic ways with colorful environments, making them the perfect subjects to adapt into a series of minigames for the PlayStation Move.

While it's far from a deep experience, *Carnival Island*'s 35 minigames can provide a few hours of enjoyment for families looking for more to do with Sony's motion controllers. Tossing hoops over rings, playing skeeball, and knocking down milk bottles can be a blast, especially as the more ludicrous alternative modes are unlocked and more of the colorful, fun animal mascots are introduced. You might not be able to go home with a giant stuffed panda, but you'll get the enjoyment of carnival games regardless.

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE

Up to 2-player local

GENRE Party

RELEASE DATE

November 15, 2011

SUITABLE FOR

Families tired of being swindled by carnies

OVERALL RATING:

3

Cute and cuddly...and they won't make a mess on your carpet.

Playing with them is fun if you're young; if you're older, pop in another game.

EYEPET & FRIENDS

EVERYONE

E

CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Publisher: Sony Computer Entertainment America • Developers: SCEA, SCEE London Studio • Platforms: PS3 • Words: Hollander Cooper

Last year's *EyePet* was very obviously aimed at the younger crowd, and the sequel, *EyePet & Friends*, is no different. You can adopt an adorable EyePet to play with in your augmented-reality living room using the PlayStation Eye camera and Move controller, dressing it up in adorable clothes and playing adorable games with your adorable digital friend. The sequel has some enhanced customization options that help flesh out the experience, but the core of the game hasn't changed much from the original...with one notable exception: the addition of multiplayer. *With Friends* allows two kids with two Move controllers to play with two EyePets at a time, making it ideal for households in which one EyePet genuinely wasn't enough (and for families with more than one child, there's a good chance it wasn't).

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
2-player local
GENRE Pet simulation
RELEASE DATE
November 15, 2011
SUITABLE FOR
Children who aren't good at sharing

OVERALL RATING:

2.75

KINECT SPORTS SEASON TWO

EVERYONE

E

CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Publisher: Microsoft Game Studios • Developer: Rare, BigPark • Platforms: Xbox 360 • Words: Timothy J. Seppala

With most Kinect games, there's a point where I realize how much I look like an idiot when pantomiming in front of my TV. That didn't happen often in *Kinect Sports Season Two*. When gestures and voice commands worked as intended, playing was a blast. Gesture control lends itself well to simplified skiing, golf, tennis, and especially darts.

What tarnishes the experience is *Season Two*'s stripped-down versions of traditional sports. In football, I could verbally hike the ball or choose a play, but it rarely registered, and passing and running felt far too simple. Baseball is a bit better, but fielding control is sparse and batting just feels off. It's weird how oversimplification hindered these sports. *Season Two* worked best when the underlying tech stopped slapping me to remind me of its limitations.

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Two-player local or online
GENRE Sports

October 27, 2011
SUITABLE FOR
Party hosts without dartboards

OVERALL RATING:

3

▼ Football so simple, even a waterboy could win.

What's bright red and can poke an eye out? You!

Sometimes you'll drive; other times you'll shoot down enemies.

▼ Both Tintin and Snowy (the dog) are playable at different points.

THE ADVENTURES OF TINTIN: THE GAME

EVERYONE 10+ E — CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Publisher: Ubisoft • Developer: Ubisoft Montpellier •
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, Wii, PC, Nintendo 3DS • Words: Andrew Hayward

Based on the Steven Spielberg-directed CG film (itself inspired by the classic comics), *The Adventures of Tintin* sports more style and panache than most movie games, thanks to sleek looks and animations. Plus, it has fun side-scrolling missions that let you use items and oil slicks to creatively defeat foes, as well as decent flight and motorcycle segments.

But while this kid-friendly action affair pops in some spots, it also falters elsewhere, with sloppily designed cut-scenes, shaky storytelling, and repetitive gameplay. The local co-op side missions are an interesting touch, but the brief and incredibly linear solo campaign largely limps along, never quite finding the audacious spirit of the source material.

The Adventures of Tintin comes across as a missed opportunity—solid ideas likely didn't have enough time or budget to shine.

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
2-player co-op local
GENRE Action

RELEASE DATE
December 6, 2011

SUITABLE FOR
Young adventurers, *Tintin* lovers

OVERALL RATING:
2.5

YOUR SHAPE: FITNESS EVOLVED 2012

EVERYONE E — CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Publisher: Ubisoft • Developer: Ubisoft Montreal •
Platforms: Xbox 360 (Kinect required) • Words: William O'Neal

I've always been into exercise—such as cycling, running, and skiing—but as I get older, it's apparent that the physical activities I enjoy aren't enough to compensate for all of those hours spent getting pwned in *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3*. Enter *Your Shape: Fitness Evolved 2012*.

The third game in the series enhances its already-winning strategy by making changes based on user feedback. The game sports over 90 hours of activities, but I found that we tailored our workouts to our specific interests: I focused on cardio, abs, and upper-body workouts, while my girlfriend stuck with dance workouts and yoga. Also, Kinect can now see you when you're on the ground, so you can do push-ups, sit-ups, and crunches aplenty. Simply put, if you have a Kinect and 30 minutes a day, it's a great way to stay in shape or drop some pounds.

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Up to 4-player local
GENRE Exercise
RELEASE DATE
November 8, 2011
SUITABLE FOR
Gamers who hate going to the gym

OVERALL RATING:
4.5

▼ Your "coach" will chide you during your workout if you start to slack.

Your Shape will have you working out in some exotic locales.

Wireframe spaceships and bunny-eared anime girls do so go together!

Busy backgrounds can clog your vision during gameplay.

OTOMEDIUS EXCELLENT

TEEN T

Publisher: Konami • Developer: Konami • Platforms: Xbox 360 • Words: Heidi Kemps

Traditional scrolling arcade shooters are great, but how do you make an old genre stand out today? Konami's idea with *Otomedius Excellent* is to spice it up by trading in rockets for cute anime girls. It's a fun concept, and the game itself is laden with references to various Konami titles. The user-controlled power-up system from the Gradius games returns—weapons and skills you earn help you customize your character.

It's cute and saucy, but often surprisingly dull, with boring stage designs and uninteresting encounters. There are other issues, too: Background elements can distract from the foreground action, and it can be tough to recover after death. Online and offline co-op works well (but plays slightly differently), making *Otomedius* a decent option, but if you're not into the fan service, these lovely ladies may leave you cold.

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Up to 3-player co-op online
GENRE Shooter
RELEASE DATE
November 8, 2011
SUITABLE FOR
Only the most dedicated fan-service geeks

OVERALL RATING:

2.5

Ash Crimson's machinations finally come to fruition in *KoF XIII*.

The retro look means that everything old is...well, old again.

KING OF FIGHTERS XIII

TEEN T

Publisher: Atlus • Developer: SNK Playmore • Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360 • Words: David Chapman

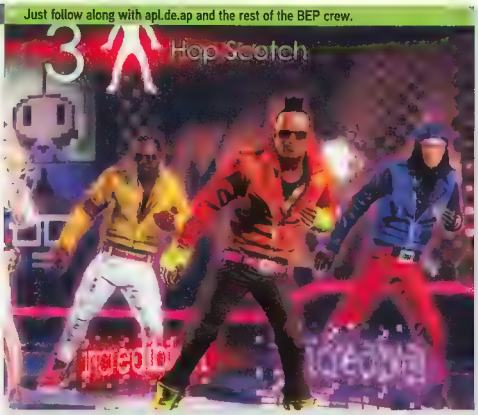
You've got to give credit to the *King of Fighters* series. If nothing else, it's got staying power. For 17 years now, Kyo Kusanagi and the rest of the eclectic *KoF* cast have duked it out for glory, for honor, and for the fate of the whole world. On the upside, all of those years mean that *KoF XIII* doesn't skimp on its 30-plus strong character roster.

Unfortunately, the game still seems to be grounded in its past, with graphics and sound that feel like they were pulled straight from a '90s arcade. There's a fine line between having a retro feel and simply being outdated, and *KoF XIII* clumsily walks that razor's edge. Longtime fans will still love the sense of nostalgia and the return of some of the series favorite characters, but with so many other updated fighters on the market, it's probably time for *King of Fighters* to abdicate its throne.

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
2-players local or online
GENRE Fighting
RELEASE
November 22, 2011
SUITABLE FOR
Retro arcade fighting aficionados and *KoF* mainstays looking for closure

OVERALL RATING:

2.5



Just follow along with apl.de.ap and the rest of the BEP crew.

THE BLACK EYED PEAS EXPERIENCE

TEEN T

Publisher: Ubisoft • Developer: iNiS •
Platforms: Xbox 360 Kinect, Wii • Words: David Chapman

Love 'em or hate 'em, it's hard to deny that The Black Eyed Peas can put on a show. Now Ubisoft has brought that same showmanship into your living room with *The Black Eyed Peas Experience* for the Kinect and Wii.

It's easy to mimic BEP's dance steps, thanks to seeing a silhouette of them in motion. It's also fun to tie those moves together in your own way via the "Choreo-Maker." You can even sit on the sidelines and play sing-along, if you've got a spare mic handy.

Unfortunately, the game doesn't always register movements correctly, particularly the more subtle dance moves. And its biggest selling point is its biggest weakness: Without the artist variety offered in similar games, *The BEP Experience* feels repetitive, much like a radio station that only plays the same handful of songs over and over.

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Up to 4-player local co-op
GENRE Dance

November 6, 2011
SUITABLE FOR
Black Eyed Peas fans looking to shake it on the dance floor

OVERALL RATING:

3.5

KARAOKE REVOLUTION GLEE: VOLUME 3

TEEN T

Publisher: Konami • Developer: Hijinx Studios •
Platforms: Xbox 360, Wii • Words: Lizzie Cuevas

If you're a fan of Glee, get this game. If you love to sing, get this game. In fact, there's little that can go wrong with a karaoke game unless the game itself is horribly broken, or maybe if the entire song catalog is just awful. This is not the case with *Karaoke Revolution Glee: Volume 3*.

Whether you want to be a Billionaire (a la Bruno Mars) or are just feeling Lucky (like Jason Mraz), a song list straight from the show is so great that you'll want to sing each of the 34 tracks more than once. Thankfully, three different modes make that easy—though the only mode you really need is Quick Play, which is classic karaoke. Yearbook and Shooting Star modes are more distracting, forcing you to multitask with other gameplay elements while singing, as if the Glee clips playing onscreen aren't enough of a distraction already.

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Up to 6-player local
GENRE Music
RELEASE DATE
November 22, 2011
SUITABLE FOR
"Gleeks" who want to take their singing skills out of the shower

OVERALL RATING:

4.5

Sing your way out of a slushie to the face.

Can you out-diva Rachel Berry?

Words: Ryan Scott

DOWNLOAD DIGEST

Interested in downloadable games? *@GAMER*'s dedicated review column covers new titles, episodes, and add-ons to consider for your console and PC.

Stick with the machine gun—the other two weapons are definitely special-case scenarios.

PixelJunk SideScroller includes a co-op mode, but it definitely feels nonessential.

PIXELJUNK SIDESCROLLER

EVERYONE E ESRB

Publisher: SCEA • Developer: Q-Games • Price: $10 • Platforms: PSN (October 25, 2011)

The latest in the cool and quirky *PixelJunk* series brings a sidescrolling shoot-'em-up (spawned from a *PixelJunk Shooter 2* bonus stage) that features everything that an old-school shooter needs, while hewing to the series's sublime minimalism. Your tiny ship comes armed with a trio of weapons—a rapid-fire machine gun, a slow-but-strong laser, and an arcing whirl-cannon—and you can swap between them at will as you dodge and weave through waves of myriad enemies and associated projectiles. Sparse items upgrade your currently selected weapon, and death sets you back to your last checkpoint. It's a good thing, too; *PixelJunk SideScroller* is actually fairly challenging.

It's also a pretty long game, as this genre goes: The menu carves it up into four stages (with the fourth as an unlockable bonus on normal difficulty), and each gets further divvied into lengthy sub-stages. It's a generous stretch of shooting, sure to make the high-score-seekers happy. While I wouldn't quite put this next to, say, *Ikaruga* or *Battle Garegga*, it's a fine "shmup" that deserves your attention.

OVERALL RATING: 4.25

Daytona USA is a product of its time...but it sure brings back some great memories!

DAYTONA USA

EVERYONE E ESRB

Publisher: Sega Developer: Sega-AM2 Price: $10 Platforms: PSN (October 25, 2011), XBLA (October 26, 2011)

In 1994, *Daytona USA* was a hot item in arcades, sublimely surpassing its peers, notably *Ridge Racer* and Sega-AM2's own *Virtua Racing*. Today, it's little more than a nostalgia-powered curiosity—though still an enjoyable one. This rerelease does slightly gussy things up with a handful of racing challenges, but you're stuck with only three tracks and a couple of stock cars. I'd point you to multiplayer, but the online lobby is a ghost town. Get it for the nostalgia factor...but don't expect too much.

OVERALL RATING: 2.5

If you ask me, what he's *really* on the run from is the FDA.

BURGERTIME WORLD TOUR

EVERYONE E ESRB

Publisher: Konami • Developer: MonkeyPaw Games • Price: $10 • Platforms: XBLA (November 2, 2011)

The best HD remakes of arcade classics give us such gems as *Pac-Man: Championship Edition DX*. The mediocre-to-fair ones turn out like *Burger-Time World Tour*. Nothing's wrong with it, per se; it adds some stylized gloss to the act of negotiating multi-tier catwalks to drop various hanging hamburger contents down into assembled full-sandwich forms, all while evading sentient rogue vegetables. Unfortunately, it's no more than the sum of its parts, offering nothing to strive for beyond conquering a grip of same-y levels. It's fun for what it is, but it's a one-trick pony.

OVERALL RATING: 2.5

BEJEWELED 3

Publisher: PopCap Games • Developer: PopCap Games • Price: $15 • Platforms: XBLA (October 19, 2011)

At this point, PopCap's *Bejeweled* games are an institution. And while the widespread perception of this insanely addictive puzzler series pegs bored housewives as the keystone of its popularity, the truth is, it's a guilty pleasure for an awful lot of gamers, hardcore or not. *Bejeweled 3* once again demonstrates how the people at PopCap have mastered the art of making this so, with a sheer simplicity and a polished presentation that other casual game developers can only dream of equaling.

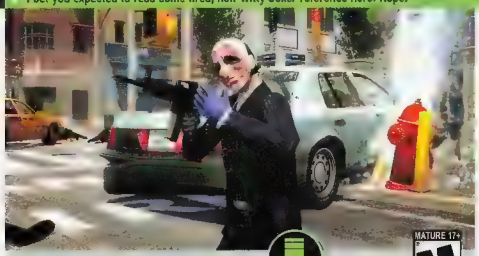
Eight distinct modes present various takes on the series's match-three rules. Of course, nothing's wrong with the barebones classic mode—or its Zen version, an endless variant where failure's not an option—but the other offbeat minigames take a turn for the creative. The highlights: a one-minute how-high-can-you-get Lightning mode (very reminiscent of Facebook-favorite *Bejeweled Blitz*), a tricky Poker mode that finds you constructing strong card hands from matched gems, and a Butterfly mode that pressures you to pop colored butterfly-shaped jewels before they're eaten by a sinister spider lurking atop the pile. It's the sort of engaging (and time-sucking) gameplay that hides layers of strategy under a veil of ease—PopCap's magic at work.

OVERALL RATING: 4.5

Matching more than three gems brings special jewels that trigger poppin' chain reactions.

Butterfly Mode becomes an unbelievably tense—and addicting—game of plate spinning

I bet you expected to read some tired, non-witty Joker reference here. Nope!



PAYDAY: THE HEIST

Publisher: SOE Developer: Overkill Software · Price: $20
Platforms: PSN/PC (October 18, 2011)

Call it *Left 4 The Bank*: This four-player co-op bank heist shooter scratches the same team-objective itches as Valve's undead-killin' adventures, offering a stylish yet serious take on gritty *Heat*- and *Dark Knight*-inspired thuggery. And while the frantic goals can be vague, and pitched firefights can earn you a too-quick trip back to the lobby screen, *Payday* presents the sort of rewarding challenge that encourages repeat play. The game's six well-made maps are nothing to sneeze at, either; here's hoping developer Overkill Software turns out a few more!

OVERALL RATING: 3.5

Max's crazy collectibles aren't always nearly this simple.

MAX & THE MAGIC MARKER: GOLD EDITION

Publisher: Press Play • Developer: Press Play • Price: $10 • Platforms: PSN (November 1, 2011)

Fans of such games as *Kirby: Canvas Curse* and *Crayon Physics* should dig this charming puzzle/platformer, which finds Max navigating brainteasing stages with a handy orange marker. You use this onscreen stylus to draw (either with a standard controller or the PS Move) whatever shapes you see fit—platforms spanning gaping pits, scrawled steps to out-of-the-way platforms, or boxes to drop on unwitting enemies. It's a stylish puzzler that will keep you busy trying to find each level's often-tricky collectibles.

OVERALL RATING: 4.0

A-Z OF @GAMER RATINGS

GAME/PRODUCT	ISSUE #	SCORE OUT OF 5
A		
Ace Combat: Assault Horizon	14	2.75
The Adventures of Tintin	16	2.5
Air Conflicts: Secret Wars	13	3
Alice: Madness Returns	11	4.5
Assassin's Creed Revelations	15	4.5
B		
Batman: Arkham City	14	5
Battlefield 3	15	4
Bit.Trip.Complete	14	4.5
Bit.Trip.Saga	14	4.25
The Black Eyed Peas Experience	16	3.5
Bodycount	13	3.75
Brink	11	2.75
C		
Cabela's Big Game Hunter 2012	13	2.5
Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3	15	4.75
Call of Juarez: The Cartel	12	2.5
Camping Mama Outdoor Adventures	14	3
Captain America: Super Soldier	12	4
Carnival Island	16	3
Cars 2	11	3.5
Cartoon Network Punch Time Explosion XL	16	2.5
Catherine	12	5
Child of Eden	11	2.75
Chime: Super Deluxe	10	4.25
Cooking Mama 4	15	4.25
Country Dance	10	4
Crazy Machines Elements	11	3.5
Cursed Crusade	15	2.75
D		
Dance Central 2	14	4
Dark Souls	14	4.5
Darkspore	10	3.25
Dead Island	14	2.5
Dead or Alive Dimensions	10	4.75
Dead Rising 2: Off the Record	15	3
Deus Ex: Human Revolution	12	4.75
DiRT 3	10	4
Disney Universe	15	3
Dragon Ball Z: Ultimate Tenkaichi	16	2.75
Dream Trigger 3D	10	2.75
Driver: Renegade	12	3.5
Driver: San Francisco	13	4.25
Duke Nukem Forever	12	2.75
Dungeon Defenders	11	4.5
Dungeon Siege III	11	4
Dungeons & Dragons: Daggerdale	10	3.75
Dynasty Warriors: Gundam 3	11	3.25
E		
Earth Defense Force: Insect Armageddon	12	4
El Shaddai: Ascension of the Metatron	12	4
The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim	16	5
EyePet & Friends	16	2.75
F		
F1 2011	14	4
Fable III (PC)	11	4.5
F.E.A.R. 3	12	3.75
FIFA 12	13	4.75
Forza Motorsport 4	14	4.5
From Dust	12	4.25
G		
Gears of War 3	13	4.25
Go Vacation	15	3
God of War: Origins Collection	13	3.75
Goldeneye 007: Reloaded	16	3
Green Lantern: Rise of the Manhunters	12	2.75
The Gunstringer	13	3
H		
Halo: Combat Evolved Anniversary	16	4
Harry Potter/Deathly Hallows—Part 2	12	2.5
Hole in the Wall: Deluxe Edition	15	2.5
The House of the Dead: Overkill—Extended Cut	15	3.75
Hunted: The Demon's Forge	12	2.75
I		
Ico and Shadow of the Colossus Collection	13	4.75
InFamous 2	12	4.75
J		
James Noir's Hollywood Crimes	13	4.25
Jurassic Park: The Game	16	2.75
Just Dance 3	14	3
K		
Karaoke Revolution Glee: Volume 3	16	4.5
Kinect Disneyland Adventures	16	4.5
Kinect Sports Season Two	16	3
King of Fighters XIII	16	2.5
Kirby Mass Attack	14	4
Kirby's Return to Dream Land	16	3.25
Kung Fu Panda 2	11	2.5
L		
L.A. Noire	10	4.75
The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time 3D	11	4.5
The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword	15	4.5
LEGO Harry Potter: Years 5-7	16	4.25
LEGO Pirates of the Caribbean	10	4.25
The Lord of the Rings: War in the North	15	3.75
M		
Madden NFL 12	12	4.5
Mahjong Cub3d	15	2.75
Mario Kart 7	16	4
Marvel Pinball: Fantastic Four	11	4
Medieval Moves: Deadmund's Quest	16	3.25
Might & Magic: Clash of Heroes HD	10	4.75
Might & Magic Heroes VI	15	3.5
MotorStorm: Apocalypse	10	3.5
MX vs. ATV Alive	10	2.5
N		
NASCAR Unleashed	15	3.5
NBA 2K12	14	4.75
NCAA Football 12	12	4.5
Need For Speed The Run	16	3.5
NHL 12	13	3
Nicktoons MLB	14	2.75
No More Heroes: Heroes' Paradise	12	3.75
O		
Otomedius Excellent	16	2.5
Outland	11	4.25
P		
Pac-Man & Galaga Dimensions	11	4.25
Patapon 3	10	3.75
Pokémon Rumble Blast	15	2.5
PowerUp Heroes	14	4.25
Pro Evolution Soccer 2011 3D	10	3.5
Pro Evolution Soccer 2012	15	3.5
R		
Rage	14	4.5
Ratchet & Clank: All 4 One	15	4
Raving Rabbids: Alive & Kicking	15	3.25
Raving Rabbids: Travel in Time 3D	10	2.75
Rayman Origins	15	4.5
Red Faction: Armageddon	10	2.5
Red Faction: Battlegrounds	10	2.5
Red Orchestra 2	14	3.75
Resident Evil: The Mercenaries 3D	11	4.5
Resistance 3	13	4.5
Rise of Nightmares	13	3.5
S		
Saints Row: The Third	15	4.25
Serious Sam 3: BFE	16	4.25
Shadows of the Damned	11	4.25
Shin Megami Tensei: Devil Survivor Overclocked	13	4.75
The Sims 3: Generations	11	4
The Sims 3: Pets	14	4
Sniper: Ghost Warrior (PS3)	11	3.5
SOCOM 4: U.S. Navy SEALs	10	3.5
Sonic Generations	15	3.25
Spider-Man: Edge of Time	15	4
Star Fox 64 3D	13	4.25
Stronghold 3	15	2.5
Super Mario 3D Land	16	4.5
Supremacy MMA	13	2.5
T		
Tekken Hybrid	16	2.5
Tetris Axis	15	3.25
Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell 3D	10	2.75
Tropico 4	12	4.25
U		
Ultimate Marvel vs. Capcom 3	16	5
Uncharted 3	15	5
V		
Virtua Tennis 4	10	3.5
W		
Warhammer 40K: Space Marine	13	4
White Knight Chronicles II	14	2.5
The Witcher 2: Assassins of Kings	11	5
World of Tanks	14	4
WWE '12	16	4
Y		
Your Shape: Fitness Evolved 2012	16	4.5

Disney

Make it Fun.
Make it Family.
Make it Disney.

Wii, PS3 and X360 $39.99 after $10 savings

Wii, PS3 and X360 $29.99 after $10 savings
DS, 3DS $19.99 after $10 savings

Wii $19.99 after $10 savings

Wii and PS3 $29.99 after $10 savings
DS $19.99 after $10 savings

Wii, PS3 and X360 $19.99 after $20 savings
DS, PSP, 3DS $19.99 after $10 savings

SAVE ON THESE DISNEY GAMES NOW

Prices valid 1/1/12 – 3/3/12. While supplies last.

EVERYONE to EVERYONE 10+ ™
E-E 10+
Cartoon Violence
Comic Mischief
Crude Humor
Violent References
ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

Wii. NINTENDO DS. NINTENDO 3DS.
PlayStation. XBOX 360 XBOX LIVE. Disney

© Disney. ©Disney/Pixar. The Pirates of the Caribbean ©Disney. The Videogame software © 2011 TT Games Publishing Ltd. Produced by TT Games under license from Disney and the LEGO Group. LEGO, the LEGO logo, the Brick and the Knob configurations and the Minifigure are trademarks of the LEGO Group. © 2011 The LEGO Group. KINECT, Xbox, Xbox 360, Xbox LIVE, and the Xbox logos are trademarks of the Microsoft group of companies and are used under license from Microsoft. Nintendo properties are trademarks of Nintendo. ©2011 Nintendo. "PlayStation" and the "PS" Family logo are registered trademarks and the PlayStation Network logo is a trademark of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc.

GEAR

90 Sony PlayStation 3D Display Bundle

92 Acer Iconia TAB A500 Tablet

93 Razer Anansi MMO Gaming Keyboard

94 Trifton Detonator Stereo Headset for Xbox 360

95 Turtle Beach Ear Force XP500 Wireless Gaming Headset

Where to purchase?

Online

Visit www.bestbuy.com for info on availability.

YOU LIKE GEAR, WE LIKE GEAR... EVERYBODY WINS!

92

93

Photos: Samantha Berg

WILL SAYS:

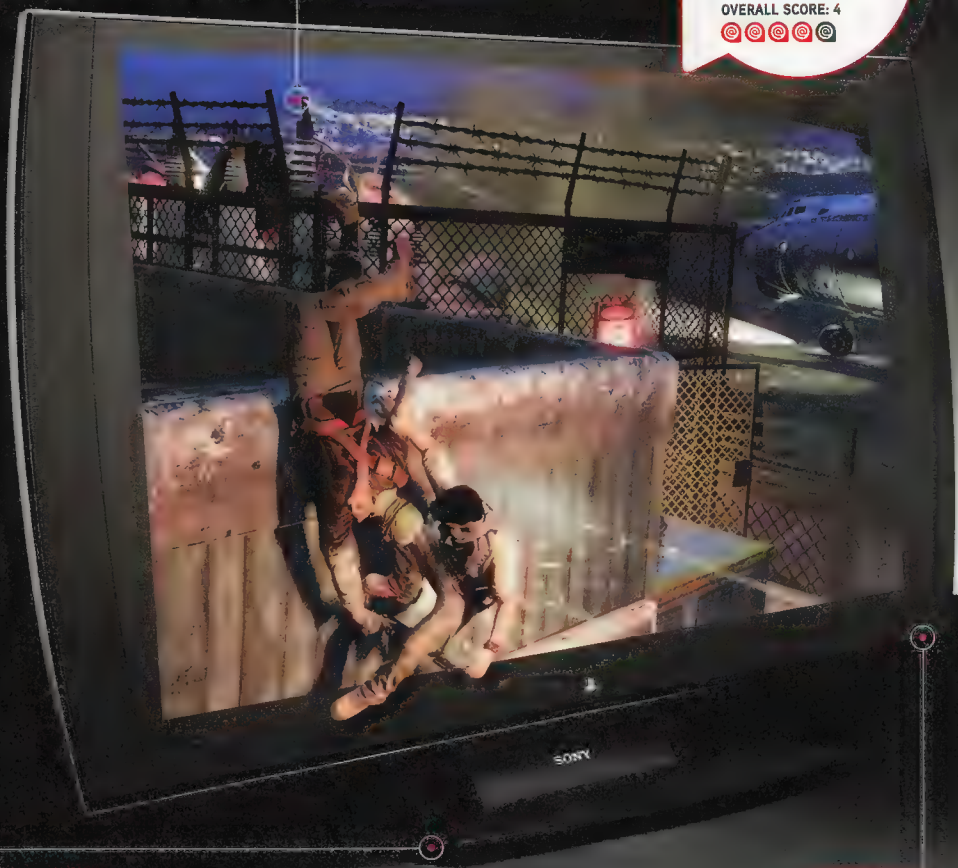
While 3D gaming is nothing new, it hasn't necessarily taken off either. Sony hopes to fix that by giving gamers an all-in-one 3D gaming solution. How does this 3D bundle stack up? We put it through its paces to tell you. We also got our hands on Acer's latest Nvidia-powered Android tablet, an MMO keyboard... and, of course, headphones.

PLAYER TWO:
Enjoy multiplayer minus splitscreen thanks to Simulview, a feature that uses 3D glasses to deliver a different full-screen image to two separate players. A few games support it so far.

SONY PLAYSTATION 3D BUNDLE

Manufacturer: Sony
www.playstation.com
Price: $499.99

OVERALL SCORE: 4



STAND UP:
I was disappointed that the TV was not wall-mountable, so count on making space for the stand somewhere.

Videogames and Blu-ray movies look crisp and colorful on the 240Hz 1080p display whether viewing in 2D or 3D mode.

SONY PLAYSTATION 3D BUNDLE

The future of gaming jumps into the living room — Words: Jason Buhrmester

Videogames and 3D were born to be together. Don't believe it? Check out *Resistance 3* and watch Chimeran bullets fly from the screen, or floor it past a crowd of cars through the hairpin turns of Daytona in *Gran Turismo 5*. Going back to 2D gaming afterwards just isn't the same.

Luckily, the new Playstation 3D Display is a solid entry point for taking your gaming into the third dimension. The bundle includes a 24-inch 3D display, a pair of active shutter 3D glasses, an HDMI cable, and a copy of *MotorStorm Apocalypse*. The LED-backlit display produces 1080p resolution at a smooth 240Hz refresh rate and can operate in 2D or 3D mode for watching TV and Blu-ray movies. The glasses sync easily with the push of a button and are rechargeable via USB. Unfortunately, the bundle only includes one pair of glasses. Plan on picking up another pair, which will set you back $70.

You'll want that extra set of glasses for Simulview, a feature that allows two-player gaming off a single display without a splitscreen. Simulview pulls this off by giving each player their own HD feed (albeit in 2D) while wearing 3D glasses. Even better, it cuts out cheating by keeping the other player from seeing what you're doing.

At 24 inches, the Playstation 3D Display isn't going to take over your living room, but set up in a bedroom or office it's a lot of fun and the perfect first step toward a 3D future.

GET CONNECTED: The back includes two HDMI inputs and one component input for [illegible] a PS3, PC, [illegible]

SOUND OFF: Built-in speakers and a subwoofer won't blow away audiophiles, but the set includes stereo RC outputs and a headphone jack.

COMFORTABLE: The active shutter 3D glasses are comfortable, if a bit geeky. They include a lithium-ion battery that is rechargeable via USB. The bundle includes one pair of glasses, and additional pairs will set you back $70.

ACER ICONIA TAB A500 16GB 10-INCH TABLET

Manufacturer: Acer
www.acer.com
Price: $399.00 (16GB)
Price: $499.00 (32GB)

OVERALL SCORE: 4.25

ACER ICONIA TAB A500 10-INCH TABLET

Good looks and performance to match • Words: George Jones

We've spent time with several Honeycomb (3.x) tablets, and it's become clear that the new tablet version of the Android OS is a system hog capable of slowing down inferior hardware.

This only makes me appreciate Acer's newest tablet more. The A500 has power, with Nvidia's 1.0GHz dual-core Tegra 2 processor, 1GB of DDR2 system memory, and 16GB of storage that is expandable via microSD and USB drive.

Tegra 2 enables startlingly good-looking 3D graphics at higher framerates than you'd expect. Games like *Riptide GP*, *Hockey Nations 2011*, and *Shadowgun* (all available in the Tegra Zone app store) dispense with the cartoon-style graphics, and left me utterly convinced of the potential of tablets as real gaming devices.

Acer's customization of the Android OS deserves special mention. Books, games, multimedia, and social apps and activities all have nicely designed sections in the OS.

One final thought. While I appreciate the A500's unique-looking metallic gray design, there's a downside: The A500 is a little bit bulkier and heavier than most tablets. And it feels way too slippery without a case for sure.

5MP CAMERA: The Acer's 5 megapixel rear camera is solid, but the 2MP front-facing camera is excellent, and works great in Skype.

SIZZLING SCREEN: The A500's 10-inch 1280x800 screen impressed me, particularly around gaming and video.

PORTS GALORE: If you have lots of music, pictures, or video, you'll appreciate the A500's full-sized USB 2.0 ports, microSD slot, and HDMI out.

RAZER ANANSI MMO GAMING KEYBOARD

Extra buttons come at a steep price Words: Kyle Orland

RAZER ANANSI MMO GAMING KEYBOARD
Manufacturer: Razer
www.razerzone.com
Price: $99.99
OVERALL SCORE: 3

With modern MMOs often putting hundreds of spells, weapons, and items at your disposal at any one time, it can sometimes seem like there aren't enough easy-to-reach keys on the keyboard to hand them all. The Razer Anansi seeks to fix that problem, offering 12 extra, user-programmable buttons for quick access to key functions or even complex strings of commands.

The seven buttons below the space bar

Both sets of keys tend to get in the way when you aren't gaming, though.

Before you plunk down $100, note, too, that a number of free software utilities will let you map complex commands to various key combinations on your current keyboard, which might be a simpler fix than this pricey number.

BUTTON BALORE
The extra pinky-positioned buttons on the left side can be a little awkward to reach while playing.
THUMB BUTTONS
The thumb buttons below the space bar are handy, but not necessarily worth the purchase price.

TRITTON DETONATOR XBOX 360 HEADSET

Sound issues mar a stylish, comfortable product | Words: Kyle Orland

TRITTON DETONATOR XBOX 360 HEADSET

Manufacturer: Tritton
www.trittonusa.com
Price: $79.99

OVERALL SCORE: 2.5

Even before you open the box, it's clear Tritton's Detonator Xbox 360 headset is a stylish piece of work, somehow projecting both a gentle roundness and cutting angles at the same time. The strong first impressions continue when you ease the padded leather earcups and deliciously cushy strap onto your head. Then you actually turn on the audio and those positive first impressions go flying out the window.

From the first moment I used my Detonator review unit, I noticed a distinct lack of power from the audio signal in the right earcup, which made it seem like the entirety of the game world had shifted a few feet to the left, aurally. The problem went away if I shook my head a bit and banged the earcup with my palm, but it would come back every few minutes if I wasn't extremely careful to hold my head perfectly still.

It's a shame, because when the audio was working properly the Detonator provided a rich, powerful sound that was so comfortable I largely forgot I was wearing it. Given the persistent audio problems I encountered, though, I just can't bring myself to give this one a recommendation.

CONTROLS: A convenient switch provides large, easy-to-read buttons for quickly muting the sound or microphone and to allow you to stop your own voice coming through to your ears.

SOUND ISSUES: Unfortunately, the sound signal to the right earcup has a tendency to frequently go weak, leading to a poor stereo signal.

TURTLE BEACH EAR FORCE XP500

TURTLE BEACH EAR FORCE XP500

Manufacturer: Turtle Beach
www.turtlebeach.com
Price: $269.99

OVERALL SCORE: 4.5

Truly wireless game chat, for a price • Words: Kyle Orland

Most wireless headsets are not truly wireless when it comes to the Xbox 360, where some sort of tether needs to be hooked up to the controller to let the microphone work with the system. Not so with Turtle Beach's Ear Force XP500, which comes with built-in Bluetooth and a wireless adapter for your Xbox controller, allowing for truly wire-free chat and audio that also works on the PS3 and PC.

Hooking up the base station and pairing the Bluetooth is surprisingly straightforward, and the Bluetooth support even allows you to stream music or answer phone calls from most mobile phones without removing the headset.

The sound quality is generally excellent, though I found the sound would occasionally go out for a second or two, especially if I moved my head. And while the unit's fabric cushions are plenty comfortable, they can get a little scratchy against your skin. These are minor annoyances, but ones I didn't expect from such a pricey, high-end unit.

CONTROLS:
Well-designed on-ear controls let you adjust everything from volume to microphone muting.

MICROPHONE:
Built-in Bluetooth means truly wireless gaming chat, and even the ability to answer your phone!

COMFORT:
The padded fabric cushions are comfortable enough, but can feel a little scratchy against skin.

If you have some videogame "facts" you want to verify as real or urban legend, ask Andy: Send your questions to andy@atgamermagazine.com.

What's in a Name, Part 2

One of the biggest decisions that a company makes is what to call itself. A moniker is like a handshake or saying "Hello" to someone for the first time, and the business will be judged on it from then on.

In @GAMER's second issue, I looked at how some game companies—specifically, Nintendo, THQ, and Ubisoft—got their corporate names. Seems like a good time to visit that territory again with a couple of other familiar companies from the gaming world.

TRUTH OR LIES:

I remember when Sony used to have the 989 Sports label for all of its sports games. Did the developer start doing business in the year 1989—and could it be that that's where the name came from?

LIES

Sony did have a Los Angeles–based game label that started in 1989, which was called Sony Imagesoft. The electronics giant hadn't yet come up with the PlayStation—that was first released in 1994—but it was publishing games for NES, SNES, Sega CD, and other systems. Among the games published were *Super Dodge Ball*, *Extra Innings*, and *Bram Stoker's Dracula*.

The 989 name (first 989 Studios, then later 989 Sports) came from the address where the developer was started in the late '90s: 989 Hillsdale Blvd., in Foster City, CA—which is one of the buildings where Sony Computer Entertainment America (SCEA) is still headquartered and does its PlayStation business.

Not only is the 989 name no longer a publishing banner, but SCEA is also making plans to move its headquarters to a new campus in San Mateo, about a mile from its current location. SCEA leased the office space this past September, but isn't expected to start moving employees over until 2013.

Hey there...I was talking to a friend about Capcom, and he said it got its name from the first three letters of the first and last name of its first game character: Captain Commando. Is that right?

LIES

CAPCOM®

While there was indeed a Captain Commando game—it was first in the arcades in the early '90s and later came to home consoles—the fact is, it came many years after Capcom started business in 1983. And he's reappeared in a couple of the *vs.* Capcom games that have been released. (Additionally, the character was used for a while in the late '80s as a spokesperson of sorts for Capcom USA, but apparently didn't catch on. Maybe Mega Man would have been a better choice.)

No, according to Capcom's own history: "The name CAPCOM is an abbreviation of CAPsule COMputer." The "computer" part is easy to understand, as the company wanted to create games for the growing segment of PC systems, but it explains the "Capsule" part by saying it was "based on two key concepts: 'a container packed to the brim with fun' and 'a desire to create securely packaged games to decrease the rapid expansion of pirated materials.'"

Disney UNIVERSE

SUIT UP. POWER UP. TEAM UP.

All Disney Universe video games $10 off SRP

GET IT TODAY!

$39.99 after $10 savings

Wii. XBOX 360. XBOX LIVE. PS3.

EVERYONE 10+ E 10+ Cartoon Violence Crude Humor ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

© Disney © Disney/Pixar. Wii is a trademark of Nintendo. ©2006 Nintendo. KINECT, Xbox, Xbox 360, Xbox LIVE, and the Xbox logos are trademarks of the Microsoft group of companies and are used under license from Microsoft. "PlayStation" and the "PS" Family logo are registered trademarks and "PS3" and the PlayStation Network logo are trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. *Internet Connection Required. Xbox® LIVE or PlayStation®Network membership required.

Prices valid 1/1/12 – 3/3/12. While supplies last.

Fallout NEW VEGAS®

ULTIMATE EDITION

INCLUDES:

DEAD MONEY™ • HONEST HEARTS™ • OLD WORLD BLUES™ •
LONESOME ROAD™ • GUN RUNNERS' ARSENAL™ • COURIER'S STASH™

AVAILABLE FEBRUARY 7, 2012 • WWW.FALLOUTNEWVEGAS.COM

MATURE 17+ ™

M

Blood and Gore
Intense Violence
Sexual Content
Strong Language
Use of Drugs

ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

Fallout: New Vegas® Ultimate Edition © 2012 Bethesda Softworks LLC, a ZeniMax Media company. Bethesda, Bethesda Softworks, ZeniMax and related logos are registered trademarks or trademarks of ZeniMax Media Inc. in the U.S. and/or other countries. Fallout, Fallout: New Vegas and related logos are trademarks or registered trademarks of Bethesda Softworks LLC in the U.S. and/or other countries. Developed in association with Obsidian Entertainment Inc. Obsidian and related logos are trademarks or registered trademarks of Obsidian Entertainment Inc. All Rights Reserved.

Bethesda